Joseph Brodsky Democracy!

1993

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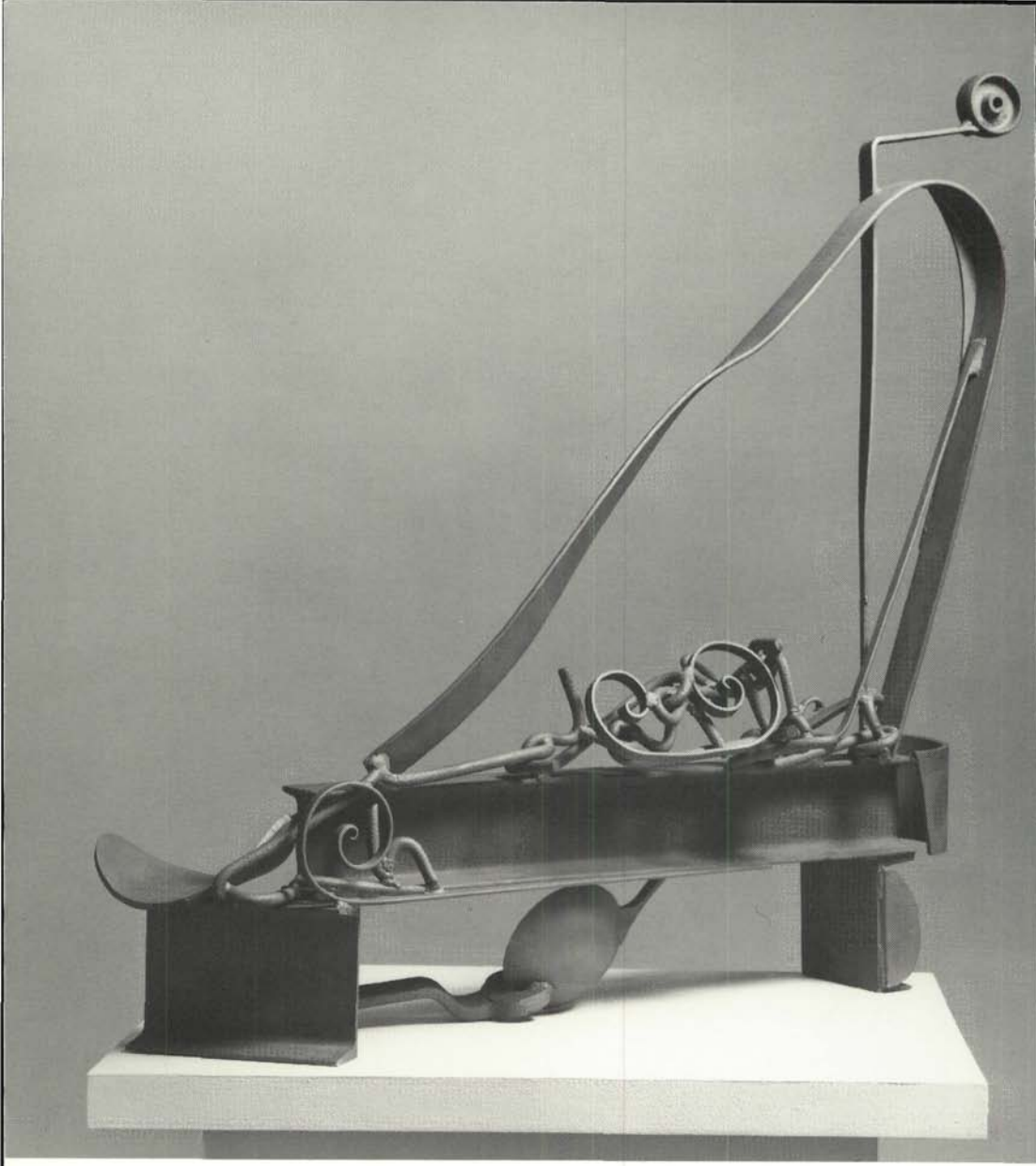

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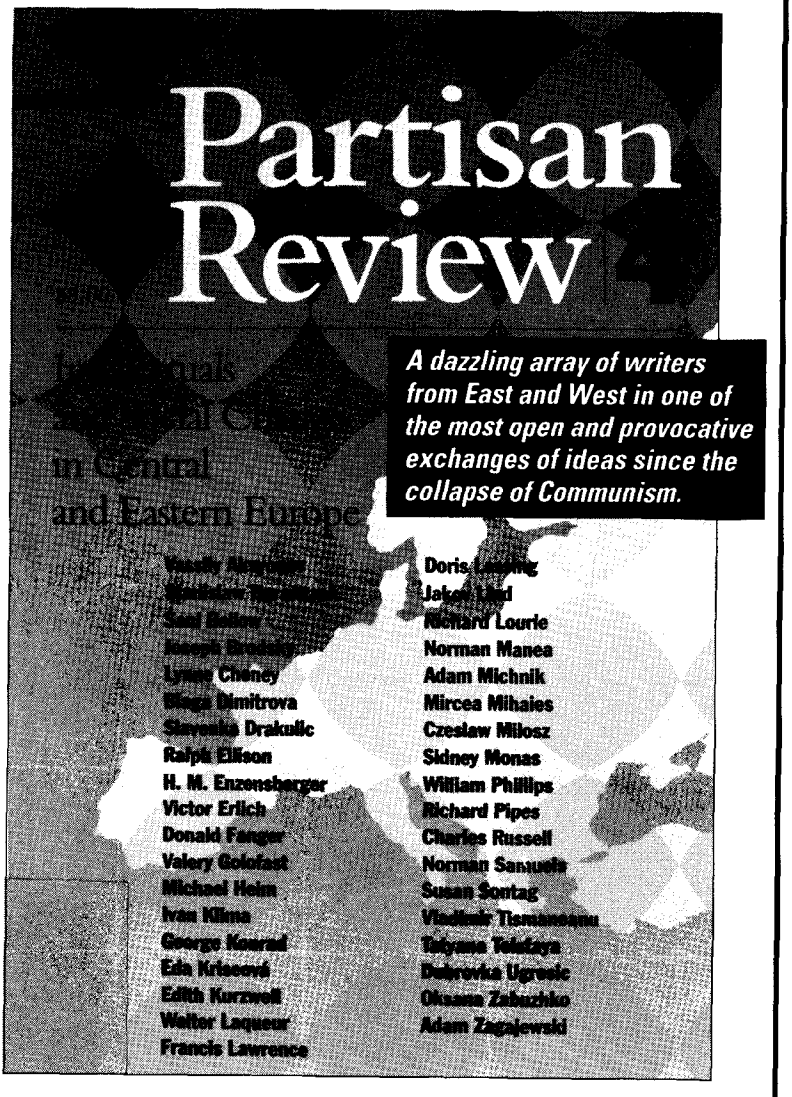

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COMMENT

Communism and the Graying of Character The name of Jan Kavan has recently cropped up in the news and has been the subject of a long article in *The New Yorker* (November 2, 1992). He is a former Czech dissident and editor of Palach Press, a dissident anti-Communist publishing enterprise based in London, and was a member of the Czech Parliament after the fall of Communism. But recently he has been accused of having been a collaborator with the Czech Communist government, of being an informer. He has disputed the charge, but so far he has not been officially vindicated. I have no way of judging the truth of the matter. But I might add a footnote to the story.

In the 1950s we received an anti-Communist "Czech Letter" from Kavan, and it was published in *Partisan Review*. Subsequently, we published another letter of his anonymously. Shortly afterward, I met Kavan in London. He told me he had had trouble in getting out of Czechoslovakia. He had almost cleared Customs when the assiduous inspectors found the name and address of *Partisan Review* in his diary, and they detained him for further questioning. Fortunately, Kavan said, he had been able to convince them of the harmlessness of the reference to *Partisan Review* and was permitted to leave.

He then told me he was going back to Czechoslovakia. And when I told him he should not go, that it was too dangerous, he might be arrested or even shot, Kavan insisted he had to go. He said it was his cause, his mission, to combat the Communists. I couldn't dissuade him, and although I am not certain, I gather that he did go back. I might add that my instincts in this area have been quite good, and I thought at the time that he was telling the truth. Moreover, Josef Skvorecky, whose reputation is impeccable, has written in *Commentary* (Letter to the Editor, February 1993) that the charges against Kavan and other dissidents were made by Communists and are worthless.

The entire incident leads one to reflect on the effect of Communism and anti-Communism on people's lives, producing what might be called the graying of character. In fact, the article in *The New Yorker*, which seemed well-informed and well-argued, made the point that people under Communism suffered such severe, unrelenting, and diabolic pressures that many, even some of the dissidents, were forced into meaningless but seemingly compromising situations, which they could not resist or perhaps completely grasp. These pressures appear to have been greater on dissidents than on ordinary citizens, whose daily lives lay largely outside of politics. Václav Havel, for example, said recently that no one, not even

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he, was completely free of the effects of insidious Communist harrassment, imprisonment, and mental torture. It was the graying of Czechoslovakia.

But as we probe further into the aftereffects of Communist and anti-Communist beliefs as well as of Communist pressures, not only in Eastern Europe but also in America where Communism had no real political power, it becomes evident that many people's lives and careers were distorted, and some were destroyed. One can think of a number of Communists whose blind belief in and obedience to the Party line warped their intelligence and talents and converted them into mental robots. Even today, when Communism, strictly speaking, no longer exists in this country, many academics who cling to some version of Marxism have lowered their consciousness below the level required to function in their disciplines.

Some anti-Communists have suffered too. I am not thinking of the many anti-Communists who have kept their political balance while strenuously pointing out the false doctrines and bad faith of the Communists. But given the extent of the political and intellectual provocation, it has not always been easy to keep one's balance. And some anti-Communists perceived only one enemy, one distortion of the truth, one form of doctrinaire thinking, one kind of false consciousness in the world at large. To be sure, the Soviet Union was the principal destructive force – following the defeat of fascism – but there have been other political forces to contend with, other issues. For example, those intellectuals who supported McCarthy in the 1950s were not always wrong in their estimation of Communism, but they ignored the menacing politics at the other end of the spectrum and too readily accepted McCarthy.

Communism has been not only an all-enveloping doctrine and a social system. It also has been a pathology, a destroyer of character, a way of warping one's life by forcing oneself not to think. I recall, for example, when I was a very critical fellow-traveler, briefly in the thirties, that a number of talented fiction writers and poets misused their talents. They either were glued to the Party line and their writing suffered from the current "proletarianitis," or, cynically, they partially accepted, partially avoided, the Communist line and wrote out of both sides of their mouths. One gifted poet lost his gifts as he played the game of literary spokesman. The rumor was that his attractive wife kept him loyal to the Party, but apparently he was too weak or too compromised to shake off the influence. There was another gifted poet who solicited for publication an essay by Philip Rahv and myself, and then failed to support it against the attacks of the Party. I excused him at the time, perhaps too easily, on the grounds that he was teaching at a college with a largely Communist faculty, and that he was ill and had a family to support.

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Another typical example of a lapse of character occurred in the fifties, when I had lunch with Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Paris. Merleau-Ponty was endowed with large intellectual abilities but also with a weakness for the attraction of Communism, at least earlier in his life, and a considerable sense of caution to go along with it. Who could blame him? He was surrounded by Sartre and faced a dominating section of the French intellectual community. The Communists, with their influential trade-union backing and support by the media, were the strongest party in France. It even was said that they could have seized power, but that Stalin was afraid it might provoke a war. At the time, there was a small anti-Communist community, an oasis, in Paris, including Saul Bellow, Raymond Aron, Manès Sperber, H. J. Kaplan, Mary McCarthy (this was before her pro-Vietnam phase), Herbert Gold, David Rousset, and myself. At any rate, during lunch with Merleau-Ponty, I was arguing with him about the Soviet Union, when I noticed he had become uneasy. I asked him whether he was disturbed by the possibility that the people near us could hear that he was even talking to an anti-Communist. He rode this one out by replying that they did not understand English, the language in which we were speaking.

These are but scattered memories of a pervasive blight that spread not through a decade, as Auden said, but through a century. All in all, throughout most of the twentieth century, Communism produced terror in the East and distorted lives in the West. Unfortunately, some of its effects still persist in our thinking and in our susceptibility to utopian visions of liberation.

On Rereading Teachers constantly have to reread books, to refresh their memories and to bone up on the meanings of the texts. I have been rereading recently to check on my earlier impressions – which had dimmed. In one case I felt I had overvalued a work, in another I had probably undervalued it. But in all instances, I became aware that the power of the works and of course their lasting qualities came from their sense of centrality, of some capture of an aspect of the national character.

Many years ago, at the home of Drs. Yela and Henry Lowenfeld, I found myself disagreeing with Heinz Hartmann, who claimed that there was no such thing as a national character. I was in no mood to argue with the eminent psychoanalyst about so vague and speculative a subject, but was egged on by Dr. Yela Lowenfeld to pursue the disagreement. I argued limply, partly because the example of literature reflecting the national character had not occurred to me.

Now, it seems to me an important component. For example, when I

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reread *The Red and the Black*, I could not escape the feeling that the French concern with romantic escapades and their political overtones was at the heart of the story. I also felt that the rather ritualized sexual adventures somehow made the plot appear to be more ordinary than I had realized at the time of my first reading. Maybe I had been dazzled by the name of Stendhal.

On the other hand, when I reread the poetry of Pasternak in translation, I was struck by the sureness of images, and I thought I had perhaps underestimated Pasternak's poems when they appeared in *Doctor Zhivago*. I also became aware of the reflection of the Russian national character in Pasternak's reaching for the heights of the Russian experience in his poetry. This was true of the other Russian writers I reread. Akhmatova's poetry, which, however, I had not underestimated, appeared to me in a new light. I now saw the authority with which she seemed to convey a sense of living at the center of Russian life both before and after the Revolution. It was buoyed by feelings of sadness, of the proximity of death, of resignation, and of spiritual loss. Both Akhmatova and Pasternak were unmistakably Russian in their stoic exhilaration and despair. By some imaginative miracle, their poetry was both personal and national – unlike, for example, so much of American poetry today.

Similarly, another piece of fiction I have reread recently, Gogol's *The Overcoat*, is a personalization of the bureaucratization of Russian society. It actually creates a structure of fantasy out of the mythologized hierarchy of status that dictated all human relations in old Russia. Perhaps Oblomov and *The Overcoat* are obvious examples of literature reaching for the national character. But one cannot escape the impression that Russian literature is about Russia, or perhaps I should say it is a projection of the writer's vision onto the national scene. Thus Oblomov, though not deprived of his individual existence, is a metaphorical figure of the inertia of the Russian people. Even in a more complex work, such as Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, we can see the same fusion of the private with the public myth. The tensions of the narrative and the ideological forces in the lives of the main characters are connected with the crucial destiny of Russia.

Last year, I also reread *Huckleberry Finn*, a work clearly in the American grain, though zealous ideologists recently have been trying to excommunicate the book on the grounds that Mark Twain was not sufficiently pro-black. In any case, it cannot be said that the novel creates the central image of the national experience. It is one of the many marginal works, as it renders one aspect – among many – of American existence. It is no more typical than the writing of Henry James or William Faulkner, for example. The question naturally arises as to why American literature does not so directly reflect what might be presumed to be the national

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character. The reason, I suspect, is that unlike the homogeneous societies of Russia and the other European countries, America is a young, sprawling nation, priding itself on its diversity and lack of a distinct intellectual tradition. It does not have a clear image of itself. This is probably one reason why American culture has been so hospitable to the idea of multiculturalism.

Now, given the contrast between Europe and America, it is strange that I, American-born, should be conscious of national character, while Heinz Hartmann, a European by birth and temperament and a traditionalist, should have so firmly denied it. To be sure, Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser might be said to be significant exceptions, since both writers in their work presented symbolic images of America. These images were mostly negative, but so were those of the Russian writers. Lewis, of course, characterized directly the heartland of America. Dreiser was slightly more oblique. Actually, the cultivation of experience was the dominant mode of much American fiction. It is most evident, of course, in such writers as Melville, Cooper, Jack London, and Mark Twain. In Henry James, the nature of experience is reversed, becoming, for some reasons noted by his critics and biographers, a kind of inner experience. And in much contemporary fiction this approach has taken the form of psychology, of what might be called the cult of personal experience.

W. P.

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JOSEPH BRODSKY

Democracy!

Act II.

The offices of the head of a small capitalist state.

Interior: on the walls, pictures of movie and rock-and-roll stars. Antlers. A life-sized stuffed bear, in whose direction the actors nod or glance whenever the pronoun "they" is used. High windows, in the Regency style, shaded by white curtains through which one can make out the spires of Lutheran churches and signs reading Cinzano, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, etc. Long conference table overgrown with beer and wine bottles and food. On the working desk of the head of state, a stampede of telephones.

Evening.

Three middle-aged men and one woman of uncertain age consume food. They include: Basil Modestovich, Head of State; Petrovich, Minister of the Interior; Gustav Adolfovich, Finance Minister; Cecilia, Minister of Culture. Matilda, the secretary.

Not bad oysters, eh?

Yeah. Fresh.

By plane after all.

Ours or theirs?

Ours, which are just repainted theirs.

Rickety, too.

Still, just two, three hours at best.

Three.

Still fresh.

Awfully good with lemon.

Editor's Note: Act One of Joseph Brodsky's play *Democracy!* has been performed abroad and in Washington, D.C.

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Advantages of geographic position.

Europe after all.

Yes, though Central.

Even if it's Eastern.

And even if Asia, still Western.

Almost Common Market.

Only no Mercedes.

True, but the highways, too, are so-so.

Autobahn still nowhere in sight.

It's not such a simple affair.

A thousand kilometers, actually, of pure bog.

Speaking only of the western border.

And who needs the eastern?

Yes, you can ride for three years in that direction without reaching it.

Hit them with lemon, with lemon.

Only by tractor.

Or by tank.

A tank would be *from* that direction, not *in*.

He who mentions things of old, Gustav, his eye should be poked out.

And he who forgets, both.

Oh, stop it, both of you.

Yes, really . . .

Moreover, history is over.

Yeah, I've read the article. Matilda translated it from English.

All that remains is geography.

And its advantages.

History, as long as one wants something, won't end.

A Mercedes, for instance.

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Or a Rolex.

Well, a Rolex Basil Modestovich has already got.

Yeah, but he is the President. For representation.

You never know who may arrive.

Yeah, by plane.

The Queen of England.

German Chancellor.

President of Onana Republic.

Iranian Ayatollah.

Roman Pope.

Mikado.

You can't do without Rolex, it's impossible.

Otherwise you'll be late for the airport.

The main course seems to be delayed, too.

Not to mention the office.

One can miss an event.

Historical one especially.

Yeah, they always arrive with a historical visit.

Even from Belgium.

As long as the airport functions, history won't end.

And as long as people want something.

What about you, Cecilia. Want something, do you, apart from a Mercedes?

I'd have some more oysters.

No more. Four dozen's all they sent in.

Only for members of the State Council.

Yeah, for the Top. Nurturing moderate forces.

They care, after all. [*Nod toward bear.*] Nonstop transmission.

Before, it was also nonstop.

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How could you compare? Before only sound was recorded. Nowadays the picture's in color.

Sometimes mug shots.

Initialed "CNN."

They care.

More exactly, keep an eye on.

You've got a persecution mania, Petrovich, after all.

He always did.

In a word, Internal Minister.

Either persecuted or persecuting.

That happens.

A kind of complex.

A clinical case.

Oh, get off my back. Not us being monitored, it's history.

What's the point of monitoring it?

Especially when it's over.

Moreover if it's not.

Yeah, since its repertory is limited.

Uh-huh. Democracy or tyranny . . . that's all there is to it. True, Basil Modestovich?

Partly yes, Cecilia, but on the whole no . . . the main course is kind of late. . . .

You mean [*She opens her eyes wide.*] there is more?

Depends on geography. The European one, for instance, leaves history very few options. The bigger the country, the fewer, Cecilia, are the options. A big country, on the whole, has only two. Either to be big and powerful and wring everyone's neck like a dishrag. Or the other way around. Take for instance the Deutschland, or else the Russland. Now they are great; now they are splintered. Half a century this way, half a century that way. I am rounding off, of course, for didactic purposes.

Kind of like Petrovich? Now he persecutes, now he's persecuted.

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Kind of. That's why he's Internal Affairs.

N-yes. The Slavs are no longer up to External ones.

Us neither.

Yeah, these days it's Deutschland's turn to run the show. . . .

That's why Gustav is still Financial Affairs?

Precisely. Now our affairs are only Internal and Financial.

Plus culture.

Sure. With small countries, culture is the main plus, even if they've got more options.

Well, who's counting?

Right. But still: oligarchy, theocracy, partocracy, bureaucracy, anarchy, occupation, utopia – minimum seven.

Yeah, but we have Basil Modestovich for that . . . The main course is getting late, though. . . .

What seven? Maximum three. After all, we are between two great powers, which simplifies the choice.

Yeah, sphere of influence.

Yes, if they are not great simultaneously.

And simultaneously, that's even simpler.

Simply partition.

Eh, yeah . . .

Those were the days . . .

I know what you mean . . .

He who mentions things of old . . .

[*Enter Matilda wearing a leopard-skin fur coat over her naked body, pushing a little cart which is crowned with a tray of steaming food.*]

Main course!

Finally!

Valentino?

Cardin.

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But the little scarf?

From Hermés.

Hot meal!

What've we got today, Matilda? Peking duck, Szechuan prawns, Hunan piglet, and dumplings.

Chinese again.

Don't be picky, Petrovich.

Yeah, it's awfully tasty.

The main thing is variety.

The main, the second, the third.

But I'm not being picky. Simply it's torture to eat with chopsticks.

What's wrong with that? It used to be your forte.

Guuuustav!

Still, what a variety.

A gastronomical version of democracy, come to think of it.

That's why they are not rushing in with the political one.

We, too, though we go for the low-calorie version.

Right. Just imagine a parliament over there, with that billion-strong population. Whether you vote or not, what's the difference?

Yeah, imagine that you are a minority. That eighty percent are for and twenty against – still two hundred million.

And all use chopsticks. When you multiply by two you end up with four hundred million chopsticks for the minority only.

Maybe we should sell them timber to make chopsticks, eh, Gustav?

Impossible, Basil Modestovich. The country would go bald in a year. Besides, we haven't got enough people for it. Even if the process were mechanized. Not to mention doing it by hand, though hand work is better paid. Theoretically.

Matches, then, perhaps?

Matches is Swedish monopoly.

And besides not all Chinese smoke.

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But those in the minority should.

True. Take us, for instance. The whole nation is puffing.

How about we produce matches together with cigarettes? Sandpaper on this side of the pack, and matches on that. Otherwise you are all the time looking for them. This will never occur to the Swedes.

Grand. But we grow no tobacco here.

Well, then, one can glue them to Marlboros. By hand or mechanically.

What do you say, Gustav?

Yeah, but where can we get so many Marlboros?

True enough.

[*They munch.*]

Pity to lose such a market. Even if to target only a minority.

Not to mention that it would be supporting democracy.

Maybe we should sell them handcuffs, Petrovich. 'Cause they lie idle there, rusting. [*Petrovich produces a pair out of his pocket.*]

In the first place, they are rust-resistant. And secondly, how many of them have we got? We were buying them on the ratio of one-third of the population. While the Chinese, in that Shanghai of theirs alone, have more people than all together here, including the newborns. And on the whole, to sell handcuffs is to support the majority, that is, tyranny. The West won't like it.

You should have thought of that earlier, Petrovich.

But I was buying them at a discount! As a most favored nation!

All the same. That's where our gold reserve was sunk.

Yeah, and now we're smarting from it.

Sure. Making ends meet.

Well, wouldn't it be possible to sell handcuffs to the majority and, to the minority, the keys?

That, Basil Modestovich, is to support the status quo. The West won't like it.

Pity to lose such a market, though . . . Not to mention, the duck is just smashing.

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Moreover, the shrimp.

And the lamb?

There are Arabic countries also. There everybody smokes.

Right. Both the majority and the minority.

And they've all got Ronsons.

Also, by the way, rust-resistant.

Uh-huh. Besides, their outfits are like this: you can't understand where they put their hands.

There, where the Ronson is.

Not to mention the veil.

It's so to fix every hag with a man. Regardless of the visual characteristics. And no Shakespearean dramas for you. Worse comes to worst, the shock of the first night. But even that is mutual.

Petrovich, aren't you ashamed of yourself?

They need not handcuffs but . . .

Petrovich! After all, we are eating.

Oh, come off it, all of you. You, Cecilia, especially. You should know better than others that they've got no literature. Neither is there Luther nor Werther.

True enough.

Pity, then, to lose such a market.

Perhaps we should sell them our bacon, Gustav.

Well, we should increase our pig stock, first.

At least to the prewar level.

Shouldn't be that difficult, should it? After all, they saw no action.

Precisely.

Besides, that's what the loans are for, no?

However, Sura 16 of the Koran, Basil Modestovich, says he who eats pig is a pig himself.

And they don't like fish either . . . eel in particular.

Goes bad quickly, doesn't it?

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[*They munch.*]

And, the loans are not for that anyway.

? ? ?

It's all spelled out in great detail.

? ? ?

First, for the needs of the state council.

Right. That's clear. That's us.

Secondly, creation of the new democratic structures and introduction of reforms.

Approximately the same.

Then, for the development of modern technology.

From the same opera.

The last one, the biggest, for development of national resources.

That's exactly, Gustav, what I had in mind.

Water resources in particular. Water is underlined.

Right! The embankment should have been repaired a long time ago. I am ashamed to take my poodle out. . . .

Keep quiet, Cecelia. What is it they have in mind, Gustav?

That water is our main national treasure.

Well, they are right, aren't they? The lakes alone would qualify. Not to mention the sea access.

And rivers? Not to mention the swamps.

One look at the map and you get thirsty.

Or from a satellite.

Like I said: they follow. I mean, on the geography.

Only it would be nice to know how to develop them.

It's also spelled out in the loan. We must begin production of soda water on a European scale.

Though it could be Asian as well.

To look at the map, the global.

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All those teeny blue capillaries . . .

Like under Cecilia's skirt . . .

Petroooooovich.

By the year 2000, they reckon, we can corner the soda market.

Yeah, but that's pretty far down the pike.

First, you have to live that long.

I've got only one year before pension.

And besides, elections.

While the loans – they're here now.

[*They all stare at Gustav. Gustav steps back, pressing to himself a swollen briefcase.*]

Why do you look at me like this?

How?

Like this.

How like this?

[*The ring gradually closes around Gustav.*]

You know.

Don't be afraid.

Yeah, no one's going to hurt you.

It ain't painful.

Cecilia, block the bear.

But he is inanimate.

We should check that out.

Oy, three against one.

Majority's the word.

Oy.

Don't be scared I said.

Oy, oy, oy.

[*Short squabble. Petrovich emerges with Gustav's briefcase.*]

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People perish for the metal, as Shalyapin said.

Gounod's *Faust*.

Yeah, French music.

German script.

Russian singer.

Those were the days . . .

You know what I mean . . .

Eh . . .

Still, under Socialism, it never came to fistfights.

Basil Modestovich?

I mean, at the cabinet session.

Currency was different.

And values in general.

More exactly, absent.

That's why it never came to fistfights.

N-yes. Gounod is the word . . .

Especially with Shalyapin . . .

His master's voice . . .

Those were the days . . . 33 rpm . . .

But even if it was 78.

You know what I mean . . .

Yeah . . .

Those were the days . . .

How much is there, Petrovich?

According to the statement, two million.

What, dollars?

No, marks.

(Continued on page 260)

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CYNTHIA OZICK

"It Takes a Great Deal of History to Produce a Little Literature"

What did Henry James know? H. G. Wells once accused him of knowing practically nothing. In the Jamesian novel, Wells charged, "You will find no people with defined political opinions, no people with religious opinions, none with clear partisanships or with lusts or whims, none definitely up to any specific impersonal thing." Wells concluded, "It is leviathan retrieving pebbles."

James was desperately wounded. He was at the close of his great span of illumination – it was less than a year before his death – and he was being set aside as useless, "a church lit but without a congregation." Replying to Wells, he defended himself on the question of the utility of art. Literature, he asserted, is "for use": "I regard it as relevant in a degree that leaves everything else behind." There followed the famously characteristic Jamesian credo, by now long familiar to us. "It is art," he wrote, "that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance . . . I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process." And though he was speaking explicitly of the novel's purpose as "the extension of life, which is the novel's great gift," there is evidence enough that he would not have excluded the literary essay, of which he was equal master, from art's force and beauty. Thus, what Henry James knew.

To which Wells retorted: "I had rather be a journalist, that is the essence of it."

In the quarrel between Wells and James, James's view has been overtaken by times and habits far less elevated in their literary motives (and motifs) than his own, and by radical changes in the aims of education and in the impulses that drive the common culture. What James knew was the nobility of art – if, for him, the novel and the literary essay were not splendors just short of divine, then they were, anyhow, divining rods, with the capacity to quiver over the springs of discovered life. What Wells knew was something else – the future; us; what we are now. He welcomed the germinating hour of technology's fecundity, and flourished in it. James, we recall, switched from pen and ink to the typewriter, not because he was attracted to machines – he was not – but because he suffered from writer's cramp. He never learned to type himself; instead, he

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dictated to a typist – a technological regression, in a way, to the preliterate oral; or else an ascendance to the dominant priestly single voice. Wells, by contrast, was magnetized by the machine-world. Imagine him our contemporary: his study is mobbed by computer, printer, modem, e-mail, voice-mail, photocopier, fax, cable – the congeries and confluence of gadgets and conveniences that feed what the most up-to-date colleges advertise as "communications skills."

The truth of our little age is this: nowadays no one gives a damn about what Henry James knew. I dare to say our "little" age not to denigrate (or not only to denigrate), but because we squat now over the remnant embers of the last diminishing decade of the dying twentieth century, possibly the rottenest of all centuries, and good riddance to it (despite modernism at the start and moonwalking near the middle). The victories over mass murder and mass delusion, West and East, are hardly permanent. "Never again" is a pointless slogan: old atrocities are models (they give permission) for new ones. The worst reproduces itself; the best is singular. Tyrants, it seems, can be spewed out by the dozens, and their atrocities by the thousands, as by a copy machine; but Kafka, tyranny's symbolist, is like a fingerprint, or like handwriting, not duplicatable. This is what Henry James knew: that civilization is not bred by machines, whether the machines are tanks or missiles, or whether they are laser copies. Civilization, like art its handmaid (read: hand-made), is custom-built.

Let this not be mistaken for any sort of languorous pre-Raphaelite detachment from science or technology, or, heaven forfend, as a complaint against progress and its reliefs. Gratitude for anesthesia and angioplasty and air travel, and for faxes and computers and frozen food and the flush toilet and all the rest! Gratitude, in truth, for Mr. Gradgrind and the Facts, and for those who devise the Facts – especially when those facts ease the purely utilitarian side of life. What distinguishes the data of medicine and science is precisely that they *can* be duplicated: an experiment that cannot be repeated will be discarded as an unreliable fluke, or, worse, as a likely forgery. In the realm of science, what is collective has authority. It is the same with journalism: if two reporters witness an incident, and the two accounts differ, one must be wrong, or must at least promote distrust. A unique view, uncorroborated, is without value. Wells, in discrediting James, was in pursuit of public and collective discriminations, as opposed to the purely idiosyncratic; he was after consensus-witnessing, both in science and society, and a more recognizable record, perhaps, even of lust and whim. Defined political and religious opinions, clear partisanships, persons definitely up to some specific impersonal thing.

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Defined, definite, specific – how, what, when, where: the journalist's catalogue and catechism. Naming generates categories and headings, and categories and headings offer shortcuts – like looking something up in the encyclopedia, where knowledge, abbreviated, has already been codified and collected. James's way, longer and slower, is for knowledge to be detected, inferred, individually, laboriously, scrupulously, mazily – knowledge that might not be found in any encyclopedia.

"I had rather be a journalist, that is the essence of it" – hark, the cry of the common culture. Inference and detection (accretion heading toward revelation) be damned. What this has meant, for literature, is the eclipse of the essay in favor of the "article" – that shabby, team-driven, ugly, truncated, undeveloped, speedy, breezy, cheap, impatient thing. A while ago, coming once again on Robert Louis Stevenson's "Virginibus Puerisque" – an essay not short, wholly odd, no other like it, custom-made, soliciting the brightness of full attention in order to release its mocking charms – I tried to think of a single periodical today that might be willing to grant print to this sort of construction. Not even "judicious cutting," as editors like to say, would save Stevenson now. Of course there may be an instantly appropriate objection to so mildewed an observation. Stevenson is decidedly uncontemporary – the tone is all wrong, and surely we are entitled to our own sounds? Yes, the nineteenth century deserves to be read – but remember, while reading, that it is dead.

All right. But what of the "clear partisanship" of a book review encountered only this morning, in a leading journal dedicated to reviews? "Five books, however rich and absorbing, are a hefty number for the reader to digest," the reviewer declares, commenting on Leon Edel's multivolume biography of Henry James; "a little amateur sleuthing some years ago suggested to me that the number of people who bought Mr. Edel's quintet bore little relation to the number who succeeded in battling their way through them." (Amateur sleuthing may be professional gall. "Succeeded in battling," good God! Is there a paragraph in Edel's devoted work, acclaimed as magisterial by two generations, that does not seduce and illuminate?) Edel, however, is not under review; he is only a point of contrast. The book in actual question, a fresh biography of James – in one volume – is, among other merits, praised for being admirably "short." It is "attention span" that is victor, even for people who claim to be serious readers.

And writers may give themselves out as a not-dissimilar sample. Now and then you will hear a writer (even one who does not define herself as a journalist) speak of her task as "communication," as if the meticulous making of a sentence, or the feverish uncovering of an idea, or the sting of a visionary jolt delivered by what used to be called the Muse, were no

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more artful than a ten-minute telephone conversation. Literature may "communicate" (a redundancy, even a tautology), but its enduring force, well past the routine of facile sending and receiving, is in the consummation, as James tells us, of life, interest, importance. Leviathan rises to kick away the pebble of journalism.

Yet the pebble, it seems, is mightier than leviathan. The ten-minute article is *here*, and it has, by and large, displaced the essay. The essay is gradual and patient. The article is quick, restless, and brief. The essay reflects on its predecessors, and spirals organically out of a context, like a green twig from a living branch. The article rushes on, amnesiac, despising the meditative, reveling in gossip and polemics, a courtier of the moment. Essays, like articles, can distort and lie, but because essays are under the eye of history, it is a little harder to swindle the reader. Articles swindle almost by nature, because superficiality is a swindle. Pessimists suppose that none of this is any longer reversible. That the literary essay survives in this or that academic periodical, or in a handful of tiny quarterlies, is scarcely to the point. It has left the common culture.

Some doubt whether there *is* a common culture now at all, whether it is right to imagine that "the West" retains any resonance of worthy meaning; or even that it should. To claim commonality is, paradoxically, to be written off as elitist. Politically, through exploration, exploitation, and contempt, the West has spread elitism and exclusion; but it has also spread an idea of democratic inclusiveness so powerful – all of humanity is made in the image of the One Creator – that it serves to knock the politics of contempt off its feet all over the world. The round earth, like an hourglass, is turned upside down these days, spilling variegated populations-in-motion into static homogeneous populations, south into north, east into west; the village mentality, with its comfortable reliance on the familiar, is eroded by the polychrome and polyglot. America, vessel of migrations, began it. Grumbling, Europe catches up. While the kaleidoscope rattles and spins, and tribe assaults tribe, no one can predict how all this will shake itself out; but the village mentality is certainly dead. The jet plane cooked its goose.

Between the last paragraph and this one, I took a quick trip to Paris. This is not the sort of thing a hermitlike scribbler usually does; generally it is a little daunting for me to walk the three short blocks to Main Street. But the rareness of such a plummeting from one society into another, perhaps because one's attention become preternaturally heightened, somehow illumines the notion of commonality. I crossed an ocean in an

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airplane and found, on the opposite shore, almost exactly what I left behind: the same congeries of concerns. The same writers were being talked about, the same world news (starvation, feuding, bombing) was being deplored; only the language was different. So there really is a "West" – something we mostly forget as we live our mostly Main Street lives. Suppose, then, the language were not different but the same?

And if "commonality" requires more persuasive evidence than a transoceanic flight, there is, after all, the question (the answer, rather) of English – setting aside Shaw's quip about America and Britain being separated by a common language. The mother tongue, as the sweet phrase has it, is a poet's first and most lasting home, his ineradicable patriotism.* In my teens I read Katherine Mansfield: what did a New York-born Jewish girl whose family had fled the boot of the Russian Czar have in common with a woman born in New Zealand forty years earlier? And what did this woman of the farthest reaches of the South Pacific have in common with an island off the continent of Europe? How rapidly the riddle is undone: Keats and Shelley and Coleridge and Wordsworth, to begin with. The great tree-trunk of English literature . . . no, that grand image ought to give way to something homelier. Call it the drawstring of English letters, which packs us all into the same sack, at the bottom of which – as we tumble around all mixed up down there, North Americans, Australians, Nigerians, South Africans, Jamaicans, numbers of Indians, and on and on – lies a hillock of gold.

The gold is the idea (old-fashioned, even archaic, perhaps extinct) of belles-lettres. Some will name it false gold, since English, as language and as literature, came to the Caribbean, and to New York, and to all those other places, as the spoor of empire. (Spooky thought: if not for the Czar of All the Russias, and if not for mad King George III, and if not for their anachronistic confluence, I would not now be, as I am, on my knees before the English poets. Also: no native cadences of Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, Dickinson, Faulkner, Mark Twain, Cather!) The

*I know a European writer of genius, in love with his language, whose bad luck it was to have been born just in time to suffer two consecutive tyrannies. It is a wonder that this writer lived past childhood. At the age of five, under Hitler, he was torn from his home and shipped to a concentration camp. Having survived that, he was spiritually and intellectually crushed by the extremes of Communist rule, including a mindless and vicious censorship. Currently, after the fall of the dictator, and having emigrated to America, he is being vilified in the press of his native land for having exposed one of its national heroes as a programmatic anti-Semite. After so much brutalization by the country of his birth, it would be difficult to expect him to identify himself as a patriot. But that is what he is. He is a patriot of his mother tongue, and daily feels the estrangement of exile. *Pro patria dulce mori!*

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Shropshire Lad for a while bestrode the world, and was welcome nowhere. But Milton and Mill and Swift and George Eliot and E. M. Forster came along as stowaways – "Areopagitica," and "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," and "A Modest Proposal," and *Daniel Deronda*, and *A Passage to India*. These hardly stand for the arrogance of parochialism – and it is just this engagement with belles-lettres that allows parochialism to open its arms, so that the inevitable accompaniment of belles-lettres is a sense of indebtedness. "It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature," James noted; everything that informs belles-lettres is in that remark, and also everything that militates against the dismissal of either the term or the concept.

If I began these reflections in curmudgeonly resentment of the virtual annihilation of what Henry James knew – of the demise of the literary essay – it is only to press for its rescue and reclamation. Poetry and the novel will continue to go their own way, and we can be reasonably confident that they will take care of themselves. But the literary essay needs and merits defense: defense and more – celebrants, revivification through performance. One way or another, the literary essay is connected to the self-conscious progression of a culture, whereas the essay's flashy successor – the article, or "piece" – is in every instance a pusher of Now, a shaker-off of whatever requires study or patience, or what used to be called, without prejudice, ambition. The essayist's ambition is no more and no less than that awareness of indebtedness I spoke of a moment ago – indebtedness to history, scholarship, literature, the acutest nuances of language.

Is this what is meant by "elitism"? Perhaps. I think of it as work, if work is construed (as it ought to be) as "the passion for exactitude and sublimity." The latter phrase I borrow from a young essayist in London – my daughter's age exactly – who, because of a driven Parnassian ardor and because he is still in his twenties, has, I trust, the future of belles-lettres secreted in his fountain pen. In the newest literary generation, the one most assailed by the journalist's credo of Now, it is a thing worth marveling at: this determination to subdue, with exactitude and sublimity, the passionless trivia of our time.

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MARK KURLANSKY

Letter from Slovakia

One path that is likely to be among the most traveled in the new Slovak republic is the one between the dining room table and the coffee table in the Bratislava living room of Zuzana Stern. This is the path she paces every Thursday afternoon after she has read the week's edition of *Zmena*. "Zmena" means change, and it is the title of one of the many new newspapers that have come out in the post-Communist liberty of Slovakia in recent years. When Juraj Stern comes home on Thursdays, his wife has already read the weekly *Zmena* and is pacing, ready to report the week's assortment of nebulous anti-Semitic innuendo. *Zmena* is not one of those flagrant neo-Nazi, printed-in-the-U.S.A. hate tabloids. It is respectable in appearance and tone, with a staff of recognized journalists who write Slovak, a linguistic cousin of Czech, in a well-crafted style that appears to be targeting educated readers.

The Sterns are possibly the handsomest couple in Bratislava. They both crackle with energy. She has obsidian eyes that glow a wondrous anger as she tells stories of life in fast-changing Bratislava. Juraj is small, fit, fine-featured, and so charged that it seems he cannot bear to be motionless. Their home is in an uninspired block of apartment buildings surrounded by similar blocks on the edge of town, where there was room for new construction and no costly old buildings in the way. But it is pleasant, full of paintings and books. The Thursday I was visiting the Sterns, *Zmena* published the second part of a series called "Vynútené Klamstvo" which means something like "Lie Under Duress." It does not say that the Holocaust did not happen. It simply quotes others saying so. There were, according to some people, *Zmena* reports, no gas chambers at Auschwitz, only refrigeration units. *Zmena* could just be reporting on the phenomenon of revisionism. And it could be just because Slovakian activist Peter Gall has a very classically Jewish face that the *Zmena* cartoonist portrays him in a caricature that could belong on a poster for the Nazi propaganda film *Der Ewige Jude*. And what is to be made of an editorial complaining that such a fuss was made over a Jewish cemetery recently vandalized in Slovakia, yet when the Israelis commit violence against Palestinians, nothing is said? Is it significant that when a foreign rabbi settled in the small Jewish community in Kosice, *Zmena* referred to

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"internationalism going on there"?

These items would be easy to miss if you wanted to, or, if you preferred, easy to explain. But the Sterns were worried about the future because their future is in Slovakia, which was about to become Europe's newest nation. They are concerned because the Slovakian state of 1993 is the second attempt at Slovakian nationhood. The first was as a Nazi collaborationist state under the reactionary priest Monsignor Josef Tiso. Since the fall of Communism in November 1989, both religion and nationalism have reemerged. The supporters of an independent Slovak state have seesawed between assurances that the new state would be nothing like the last one and persistent efforts to rehabilitate the name of Tiso because he led a Slovak state. Juraj Stern can remember the last Slovak state. He was a small child and his memories come in brief clips. Hiding in a bunker, covered with potatoes. Someone shooting through the potatoes. Little thwacks around him as the bullets missed. All the good Slovaks who hid him. All the bad ones who pursued him. He thinks more and more about those times as he begins to see things that he hasn't seen since his childhood. Walls in Bratislava occasionally now have slogans on them such as "Jews go to Palestine" and "Gas the Jews."

Three weeks before I talked to Juraj he had been at a soccer game; Bratislava against Budapest. People shouted the old fascist cheer "Na Stráz! [Attention!]" In the crowd, among an occasional anti-Semitic slogan, he saw two flags of the Guardists, the Slovakian SS. "We are worried about it because the new government is doing nothing against them. They [the government] are occupied with the problems of building an independent state," said Juraj. He is an economist, specializing in the organization of factory production, and the vice chancellor of the economics school at the University of Bratislava. But you do not need to be a distinguished economist to see Slovakia's dilemma. The country does not produce enough to support its population and has been living like a poor relation on the earnings of the Czechlands. Now it will be an orphan in a hostile world. Before its independence, Slovakia had already gotten into a major dispute with neighboring Hungary over a proposed dam on the Slovakian Danube.

Zuzana is a research engineer. At an office party she was talking to someone whose husband was involved with building the new Slovak state. The woman told Zuzana that there was no reason to be worried.

"I am afraid for my children," Zuzana explained.

The woman smiled and said, "Why are you afraid? I'm not afraid. Why are you afraid for your children?"

Zuzana said, "You are not worrying because your children are not Jews."

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Without a moment's hesitation the woman answered, "It is not true about the Second World War. It's not true about the Holocaust. Why are you so afraid?"

This, of course, is exactly why Zuzana Stern is afraid.

Slovak nationalists have a public relations problem. If people started to look at the history of the last Slovak state, they would be afraid to start a new one. So a little revisionism is needed to assuage public fear. But the revisionism instead reinforces that fear. The cry for Slovak independence was born out of post-Communist liberty. In the old days, just talk of such a thing could have brought Soviet tank columns in from the Ukraine. But now a democratically elected Czechoslovakian legislature has agreed to dissolve the nation and let independent Slovakia go its own way. The agreement came last spring, although it took three tries to get the break-up bill passed, not because of Czech opposition but because of Slovak hesitation. But this winter a new nation was born, as Czechoslovakia shed its poorest region.

The inevitable question when arriving in Bratislava is, can this town really be a capital city? In the days when there was a Habsburg Empire, Bratislava was a village on the Danube called Pressburg. Today it could be studied in an urban-planning curriculum as a model of what not to do. Tattered nineteenth-century grandeur, baroque spires and decorated domes surprise you around corners. But much of the town is gray, block-shaped buildings. Highways, like scars that didn't heal right, slash through the center of town. If this once quaint burg on the Danube is no longer very quaint, it is still just a burg. Only the leading bank could cash my American Express travelers cheques, and then only when I met with an executive in his third-floor office and explained what they were. This is a banking system that will soon be issuing currency and regulating an economy. In the 1960s, urban renewal meant tearing down the dilapidated historical architecture and building massive rectangles. With an ironic smile, Silvia Kraus, a nineteen-year-old medical student whose father had once lived in the Jewish quarter, called the process that had turned her world into concrete "a Communist concept." The Jewish quarter, one of Europe's oldest, vanished twenty years ago when the government decided to build a modern bridge across the Danube, connected by a major highway. By then, few Jews were living in the section, and the synagogue which was also leveled for the highway had been abandoned for decades. Only ten thousand out of ninety thousand Slovakian Jews survived the first Slovak republic. Many of the survivors emigrated between 1945 and 1968.

Silvia Kraus was still in high school in 1989. "November was the revolution," she said. "In January came the religion." Suddenly students

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were required to attend lectures by clergy. When a Catholic priest came to the school and lectured on the greatness of Josef Tiso, Silvia stood up and said, "It's not true. All of my family died in the war because of Tiso, because of the Germans and because of the Slovaks." Most of the other students were angered by this outburst and, feeling isolated, Silvia walked out of the room. In spite of such incidents, the Jews I talked to in Bratislava had seen more Jewish life in the past four years than at any time since 1968, when, following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, most of Slovakian Jewry, including the last rabbi, emigrated. There is a wide range of figures on how many Jews live in Bratislava – between five hundred and a thousand. More seem to turn up all the time as Jewish activities increase. Since 1990, a Jewish Forum has met regularly; it's usual for several hundred participants to gather to hear speakers on subjects of Jewish interest.

The new freedom since the fall of Communism means different things to different people. To some it means that you can say "Na Stráz" again. To some it means having a Jewish Forum and filling the largest hall in Bratislava, some eight hundred seats, for a Hanukkah program. To Fero Alexander it has meant learning about his country for the first time. His parents were Auschwitz survivors. His grandparents did not survive. His older brother was born in Theresienstadt. But his parents do not talk about any of this very much. Fero has a passion for Slovakian folk music, and he plays violin in a group that tours dressed in traditional Slovakian costumes. He never thought this was an odd thing for a Jew to be doing until after 1989, when an historian spoke at the Jewish Forum on the history of the Slovak state. Fero was shaken by this new information. "I didn't know. I didn't ask. Now the situation is that I know what happened during the Slovak state and still I'm here." He asks and repeats the question as though speaking to himself, "Why am I here, playing folk music?"

Since 1989 about five Slovak Jews have emigrated each year. For many Jews the issue is not so much their own future as the future of their children. Silvia Kraus's father, Tomás Kraus, thinks both his daughters should leave. But he will stay. After the fall of Communism he dropped his career as a sports journalist to start an import-export business. He believes capitalism has a future here. He even recently resigned as president of the Jewish Community to give more time to his new business. But he is determined that his daughters will leave Slovakia as soon as they finish school. Silvia says that she would at least like to do some specialty work in Vienna. "Then I will see," she said. Vienna, an impossible world away under Communism, now turns out to be a half-hour commute from Bratislava. But no one on a Slovakian salary can afford to go there.

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Economics has simply replaced police controls as the isolating factor for Slovakians.

The Sterns have resisted immigration. Zuzana visited her relatives in Israel in the 1960s, but returned feeling that Slovakia, or at least Czechoslovakia, was her home. "I think that it is very necessary that there are some communities in other countries," she said. The Sterns have always been proud of the ancient Jewish history of Slovakia, even if they are among the few Jews left. They celebrate the Jewish holidays with their closest friends, who happen to be Protestants. "It's a good thing to have some very good friends who have nothing against Jews and who are able to celebrate Jewish holidays too."

Zuzana Stern believes that by deciding against emigration in 1968, when all their Jewish friends left, "we just deferred the decision to another generation." Soon their son and daughter will have to decide. Their older son Tomás, a nineteen-year-old medical student, still has not made up his mind. Tomás's father, the economics professor, wants him to leave. Juraj sees a dismal future for an independent Slovakia. But he doesn't want to leave himself: "This is an important place for Judaism. It had one of the great yeshivas of the nineteenth century."

"The greatest," argues Tomás. "But you can't have that now."

Juraj doesn't hear his son and continues, "You can't let that disappear. Bratislava is a Jewish place."

"So you are going to sacrifice yourself for that?"

Juraj doesn't answer.

Back in my hotel on a dark street near the Danube I contemplated everything I had seen and heard, wondering, given history's lessons, if it was wise of all these people to be sitting at home, with too many rational explanations, watching events unfold. Shouldn't they leave? The situation is not difficult to predict. The Slovak state is a recipe for economic disaster. When things get really bad, who will be blamed? Who will be denounced? What will *Zmena* be saying? Up until now the moderate wing of the nationalist movement has been in control. But there are small groups of extreme right-wing nationalists, even overt Nazis. Who will come to power in the failed state? Every Jew I talked to in Bratislava gave the same scenario.

"Everybody is worried, not only Jews," said Fero Alexander. "It's a big adventure and a dangerous one – very, very dangerous. My only hope and desire is that it should work. This is the desire of all of us. If not, they will look for a scapegoat."

I was running all this through my mind, leafing through the week's edition of *Zmena*, when I heard a voice shout from the street, "Sieg

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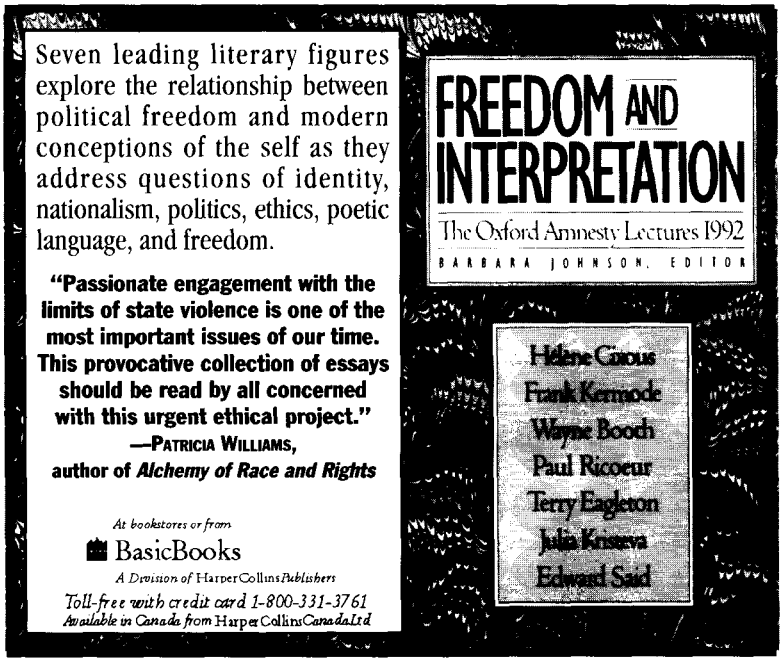
Heil!" Just a kid. Maybe I misheard it. Then I heard it again. I looked out the window into a dark street. There were three or four young people. They shouted it again. Just kids acting up, I told myself. Nobody seemed to be noticing. Besides, if they were serious Slovak Nazis, they probably would have said, "Na Stráz." Then I realized what I was doing: playing the mental game known to all Slovak Jews.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Anita Burdman Feferman

Politics, Logic, and Love

The Life of Jean van Heijenoort

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Jean van Heijenoort was a well-known mathematician and historian of symbolic logic. He taught at Brandeis University and was associated with the Houghton Library at Harvard. It was known only to a few that for many years J.v.H. had been Trotsky's secretary and bodyguard in exile. As a friend of André Breton, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, he became an interested observer of the unrest in the world of political ideas and of the arts. The book is a vivid account of the interrelation of arts and politics and is a valuable contribution to the history of ideas from an unexpected angle.

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ROGER SCRUTON

The Harrowed Tradition

The controversy over the curriculum began in classical Athens. Although Plato briefly settled the matter in favor of philosophy, it was the schools of rhetoric that were to have the widest influence in the Hellenistic period, when the Roman curriculum (which would in due course be the curriculum of the medieval university) was first put together. The dispute between philosophy and rhetoric has not ended. Indeed, it has a perennial character that suggests something deep is at issue, something to do with the conflict between truth and power. The purpose of rhetoric is to empower those who learn it; the purpose of philosophy is to enlighten. But philosophy won its following by persuading its students that enlightenment brings power. Through philosophy, therefore, we gain the prize of the rhetoricians without stooping to their methods and, in particular, without taking our eyes from truth as the supreme goal of speculation.

Today, the vestiges of this dispute are visible in American universities. Radicals argue that a traditional curriculum exists not as a guide to some objective truth about the human condition, but to create and sustain the ruling power. The curriculum has no intellectual authority, only a tacit political endorsement. We should feel free to change it – indeed, we may even be obliged to change it – in order to empower those who have suffered injustice under existing systems of privilege. Often these arguments – which exist in as many vulgar and refined forms as there are species of academic disaffection – are accompanied by an attack on the very idea of truth. Some, on the dubious authority of Nietzsche, argue that the notion of an objective truth about the human condition is a chimera and that the pursuit of truth is always the pursuit of power under another description. In a triumph of sophistical reasoning, the American philosopher Richard Rorty has managed to use the pragmatist ideas of John Dewey to banish the concept of truth from philosophy itself, so as to leave the political community, albeit a community composed uniquely of people like Rorty, as our sole point of reference.

This new eruption of the age-old contest between philosophy and rhetoric promises to tear the American academy apart and to undermine

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Editor's Note: This essay is a shortened version of a lecture given at Boston University, December 3, 1992, "On Humane Education," in which the author's argument was more completely presented.

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those subjects that cannot fortify themselves with scientific method. The humanities in particular have been destabilized. Unable to match the old consensus of theology or the new consensus of science (a consensus of method rather than of belief), the humanities have begun to drift free from any center of intellectual concern. It is no longer obvious whether any of the humanities could claim to be the core intellectual discipline, whether they could be studied independently, or what is to be studied under any particular heading. And the crisis has been compounded in our time by new developments that must be borne in mind, if we are to understand what is at issue.

First has been the decline in cultural attainment. The mass culture of pop, television, and video has generated a largely passive attitude not only to art and entertainment but also to knowledge and the world itself. The devices of mechanical reproduction give an illusion of mastery over the world. The world of the adolescent is no longer awe-inspiring, threatening, or enchanted, since he himself remains totally in charge of it, able to zap it off the screen as soon as it annoys him. It is hard for religion to take root in a mind so formed, and the steady decline of religion (which of course has other causes besides this all-pervading illusionism) has resulted in a new kind of human being, one who does not carry within his psyche the rhythms, words, and maxims of a sacred text, the melodies of sacred music, or the store of sacred narratives that show the secret meaning of the world. Those things owe their power to faith, yet they have formed the implicit framework of our culture. They cannot be removed without a universal slackening and weakening of the whole. Such rhythms, marked indelibly in the unconscious, cause their bearer to recognize *Four Quartets* as a religious poem, without the benefit of critical theories. Eliot's poem speaks to us in our own inner voice, which was once the voice of God. It is scarcely surprising if a new generation, unfamiliar with the syntax of belief, should miss the meaning of so much forthright poetry.

There have been changes in education, too, notably the so-called "relevance revolution," which made the destruction of education in the humanities into a project, rather than a byproduct of cultural transformations that it would be vain to resist. Educational theorists, again largely inspired by Dewey, argued that the old curriculum in the humanities was no longer relevant to the needs and interests of today's students. The guiding principle in curriculum "development" (itself a sinister piece of Newspeak) should not be whether a subject has been sanctioned by tradition, but whether it is relevant to the modern world. How then can we justify the study of Latin and Greek or place pure mathematics before

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computer science?

Thirdly, there has been the outbreak of "multiculturalism." The culture underlying the old curriculum, we are told, is just one among many, with no special authority for the student of today. Indeed, multiculturalists tend to be hostile to "Western culture," as they call it, and seek to undermine its ancestral claim on us, by promoting unfavorable comparisons with other, freer, more equal, or more natural ways of life. The assumptions of this outlook are not always mutually coherent. For we may be told at the same time that no culture can be judged except in its own terms and also that "Western culture" is inferior to its rivals. Yet the purpose is rhetorical, not philosophical, and for the rhetorician a dose of contradiction or confusion has never been a defect.

Finally, we have witnessed a steady politicization of the humanities, an attempt to recast the subjects and the aim of studying them in terms of a political agenda. In many ways, this politicization is the most interesting development, since it crystallizes within itself not only the other three but also the inherited contest between humane education and the social sciences. For it is usually by means of some real or imagined social science that politicization is effected. Consider this hypothesis: the traditional curriculum exists because it empowers certain social groups, reinforcing the ideology through which they control public discourse. In this way, the curriculum silences dissent, by compelling dissent to express itself in terms that neutralize its force. That is what we are told by Marxists, by Foucault, and by certain feminists. If it is true, it immediately suggests an agenda for change. Just as Walter Benjamin urged us to politicize art, so we must politicize the curriculum, in order to empower those who have been previously oppressed by means of it.

Must we accept those developments as inevitable? Should we endorse them? Should we resist them? And if we resist them, in the name of what will we do so? Those are deep and difficult questions, but I believe they are in the minds of all serious teachers of the humanities today. Of the recent developments, at least two – the relevance revolution and multiculturalism – have arisen from educational theories, a realm where vested interests advance through doctrines, and where, therefore, the disproof of a theory will not suffice to destroy it. Still, a disproof of a theory, if repeated often enough, will, in time, have an effect. And if the effect were to persuade people that educational theories have been so damaging that we ought not to provide funding to those who propose them, that would be the best effect of all.

Considered in one way, the demand for relevance is trivial. It means only that education should give the student a real education. Considered in another way, it is destructive, since it asks us to value education in

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terms of some interest other than the interest of education. Worse, it encourages us to assess the value of the curriculum in terms of the interests of those who have yet to understand it. Prior to learning them, no student is able to see the exact worth of classical languages or higher mathematics. A student must take on trust what only those who are already educated can tell him. Indeed, relevance is a wholly chimerical objective. Who is to know what will be relevant to a student's interests in ten years' time? Even in the applied sciences, it is not *relevance* that forms and transforms the curriculum but *knowledge*. A relevant technology is one that is relevant to us, here, now. To concentrate on teaching such a technology is to ensure that we remain locked in techniques that will very soon be useless.

Those considerations are perhaps obvious. But they are worth reviewing since they connect with the question of the nature and utility of knowledge itself. Knowledge advances because it is pursued for its own sake. Those who make discoveries frequently have no use for them. But invariably a use is found, and that which was most useless, and perhaps even valued for its pristine futility, like the theory of the transfinite cardinals, is suddenly revealed to be an indispensable asset to mankind. Who would have supposed that Boole's algebra and Frege's logic would lead to anything more than the rarefied speculations of philosophy? In fact they led in time to the computer revolution and to a renewed prosperity in America. The same is true of the humanities. How were those romantic students, destined for government offices in the city of London, to know that the dead languages and ancient literatures which were the sum of their learning would suddenly be precisely what they needed to govern an empire acquired in a fit of absentmindedness? Thanks to Homer and Virgil, our ancestors were able to grasp the reality of other cultures; through their knowledge of ancient history and the rhythms of ancient languages, they could summon up an intuitive familiarity with the life of other peoples. Out of this experience of applied classical scholarship the new science of anthropology was born.

I could multiply the examples, but the lesson is clear. There is a kind of utility that comes only when utility is set aside and when the useless is pursued for its own sake. True education is the pursuit of useless knowledge – knowledge severed from its present purposes and pursued wherever it may guide us. For if we do not detach knowledge from its application, we shall never acquire it. Imagine someone who sought to learn only those parts of mathematics that were useful to his present needs. Would he really succeed in understanding what he learned? Would he acquire a real interest in the subject or an ability to extend it into new areas? Would he be able to teach it to another? Ponder that last question,

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and you will see how the pursuit of relevance is in fact bound to lead in time to the extinction of knowledge – a failure to pass on what has been too hastily acquired.

I believe that we should be as impatient with "multiculturalism" as with the advocates of relevance. For once again, there is a mistaken conception of education being forced on us. The humanities, as these emerged in the new university of the nineteenth century, were not designed to instill a culture. On the contrary, they assumed that the work of "acculturation" was already complete. Their purpose was to reflect on culture and the human spirit as expressed in art, history, literature, and institutions. Naturally, those who passed through the great European and American universities tended to belong to some branch of Judeo-Christian civilization (though that civilization itself contained myriad cultures). But their education did not consist in a single-minded scrutiny of their own moral, religious, or artistic identity. On the contrary, it was assumed that the closer a matter is to the life of the student, the less impartially and instructively could he study it, and the less therefore should it be a matter of academic concern. Goethe was no part of the curriculum in Goethe's day, yet what German student refrained from reading him? Contemporary history was rarely taught, and the principal intellectual discipline consisted in the study of dead and difficult languages, languages deemed to be worthy of study precisely because of their supreme uselessness.

Reflecting on this, it is obvious how wide of the mark is the charge that has been leveled against the traditional humanities curriculum. Our ancestors studied – and I mean really studied – cultures that were entirely strange to them. They learned the languages and literatures of Greece and Rome, came to understand, love, and even worship the pagan gods. They studied and translated from Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Arabic, and roamed the world with insatiable curiosity, believing, on the best of grounds, that nothing human would be alien to them. It was second nature to the nineteenth-century graduate to learn the language of a country to which he traveled, to study its literature, religion, and customs – often to the extent of "going native," as did so many of the British in India. In comparison with those graduates, I can say only that the product of today's supposedly "multicultural" curriculum is depressingly monocultural, brought up on a mishmash of pop, soap opera, and political sloganizing whose effect is everywhere the same and everywhere forgettable. Nor should we overlook the real explanation for the true "multiculturalism" of the nineteenth-century university, shaped as it was by the cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment. For Vico and Kant, education should address itself to the *sensus communis* of mankind; that which we have in common

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and which is contained in the local forms of art and religion, because they provide the sensuous gateway to the universal idea. For Hegel, the aim of education is *Bildung*, that untranslatable word denoting, in Hegel's words, a "rising towards the universal," a transcendence of the tribal pieties towards a vision of the whole. The humanities as we know them were shaped by one of the projects of modernity, the desire to know the human heart in its entirety and so to justify the ways of man to man.

This brings me to the advance of social science. Has not the Enlightenment project precisely threatened the subversion of humane education by social science? For if there is a science which has the very same subject matter as some human study, should not the science prevail, rendering the old results and methods superfluous, and perhaps even exposing them as parts of some hidden social or political agenda? Now we know, for example, that mathematics can never be subverted by the sociology of mathematics. To explain the social practice of geometry is to give no procedure for assessing the validity of its theorems. Mathematics is an autonomous discipline, which delivers knowledge quite independent of its own social explanation. Likewise, it could be reasoned, if the humanities could be shown to have their own methods, their own results, and their own autonomous body of knowledge, they too could be saved from the incursions of social science.

Thus arose the search for method in the humanities, by which they would be distinguished from the natural sciences, while showing them to be objective in some way that deserved the name of knowledge. This search began at the very outset of the academic revolution, with the universal hermeneutics of Schleiermacher. Later thinkers – Dilthey, Husserl, Schutz, and Gadamer – refined the position bequeathed them by Schleiermacher, but without making clear what kind of understanding comes from the hermeneutical method, or even whether "method" is the right way to describe it. To say that the humanities are concerned with the interpretation of human life and artifacts is no doubt true, but with what is interpretation being contrasted, and what are the ground rules? To say, with Dilthey, that we understand the human world through an act of *Verstehen*, distinct from any project of scientific explanation, is surely also true. But what precisely is *Verstehen*, and how is it disciplined, so as to present a fuller, truer, richer, more satisfying picture of its object? Finally, to say that the human sciences take *meaning* as their subject matter is unexceptionable, but which meaning is intended? If the history of hermeneutics has been so unsatisfactory, it is through its emphasis on method in the absence of a defined goal. It is impossible to answer whether this or that method is appropriate to the study of a text, a work

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of art, or a fragment of history, if we have no idea what we seek in studying it. Conversely, if we could describe the goal of humane education, the search for method would cease to be important. Indeed, we might even doubt that a method could be found.

Rather than lose ourselves in this Teutonic fog, we might ask whether the humanities can deliver knowledge, not mere opinion, and whether that knowledge is distinct from the results of social science. Knowledge can exist without method; such, indeed is the knowledge acquired through practical wisdom in Aristotle's sense. Even when we have no criteria to guide our judgment, we can sensibly distinguish the one who knows from the one who is ignorant. It has become common, even among analytical philosophers, to distinguish theoretical from practical knowledge, referring in the first case to "knowing that" and in the second to "knowing how." But "knowing how" is a poor candidate for the goal of humane education, being but another name for Aristotle's *techne* or skill, what we might describe in more Kantian terms as the knowledge of means. If that is all practical knowledge amounts to, then it is scarcely the interesting phenomenon Aristotle supposed it to be.

There is another idiom frequently used in practical reasoning: "knowing what," as in "knowing what to do." The person who knows what to do does not merely grasp the means to his ends; he has knowledge of the end itself. The implication is that his activity is rightly directed towards a proper or justifiable goal. A person who merely "knows how" may nevertheless act in ignorance, since he has made a wrong choice of end. But the person who in addition knows *what* to do has true practical knowledge; his belief can be relied upon as true. Likewise, the person who knows *what* is the one whose action can be relied upon as right, regardless of whether he is casuistic enough to give the reason. Knowing what to do, Aristotle suggested, is a matter of right judgment (*orthos, logos*), but it also involves *feeling* rightly. The virtuous person spontaneously feels what the situation requires, the right emotion towards the right object, on the right occasion and in the right degree. Moral education has just such knowledge as its goal. And it is a curious fact, which may be held forth as a partial confirmation of Aristotle's view concerning the place of emotion in virtue, that we use the idiom "knowing what" not only of actions but also of feelings. The world is full of people who "do not know what to feel," whether in response to their personal situation or in response to the events and non-events by which they are surrounded. To understand what it is to "feel in ignorance," to feel without knowing, you need only observe the habits engendered by pornography and the uncritical display of violence and destruction on the movie

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screen.

There are two further threats to the traditional curriculum in the humanities: the invasion of their territory by social science (or social pseudoscience) and the impulse to politicize. It is far from clear how we should respond to them. We need to understand these two processes and why they have been so closely connected. So let us consider the Marxian theory of history, still the most instructive of the many attempts to replace moral by social science, and still the archetype of all radical assaults on the status quo of culture. According to Marx, history is driven by economic forces, the forces of production. Production is a social process, involving joint activity, power over people and things, and a distribution of the product. Society is based in the relations between people that govern and facilitate production, the relations of lord to serf, of capitalist to worker, and so on. All institutions, laws, and religions are to be explained as proceeding from and fortifying these fundamental relations of economic power. Classical Marxism draws a well-known contrast between science and ideology. Science delivers objective knowledge of the material world and permits mastery over nature. It is therefore not merely a form of knowledge but also a productive force, one of the motors of history. Ideology, by contrast, delivers no knowledge of the material world. On the contrary, its function is not to reveal the world but to mystify it, so that the truth of our condition (and in particular the facts of human power) shall not be clearly perceived by those who would otherwise rebel. Ideology fortifies the social order, by representing it as natural, inevitable, and right. Its significance is exhausted by its legitimizing function.

The humanities as I have described them certainly do not provide scientific knowledge. They neither explain the natural world nor conceptualize it in ways that lend themselves to explanation. There is a temptation, therefore, to think of them as part of ideology: effects of the social process that form part of a "narrative of legitimation," to use the language of the Frankfurt school. Thinking of them in such a way is a further step toward their repudiation: toward believing the humanities have no intrinsic claim over us, that the sum of their significance is delivered by the social science of their production, and that all we could conceivably study in them is their ideological function in relation to the economic processes from which they derive. That, in brief, has been the burden of Marxist and radical criticism in our century, from the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, through the structuralism of Barthes, the power analysis of Foucault, and the deconstruction of Derrida and de Man, down to the radical feminism of the American academy. Criticism has yielded to social science, while social science has become an instrument of criticism, an

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instrument that seems to draw on the indisputable authority of scientific method. By showing traditional institutions and the traditional curriculum to be part of a web of ideology whose function is to endorse the prevailing forms of power, the social scientist disenchants them. They become nothing but the power that speaks through them. Realizing this, we are released from their ghostly authority. To study them as they demand would be to endorse the system that created them; to study them with ironical detachment is to set ourselves outside their field of force, to acknowledge their meaning as a merely anthropological fact. Their meaning ceases to be a meaning for us.

The radical critique of the curriculum does not depend, however, on the truth of the Marxian theory of history, which, although a profound work of the imagination, is nothing more than that – and certainly not a science. The radical critique depends merely on adopting the external stance of the social scientist, of looking on the human world as a thing constructed, and asking why – from what cause and perhaps also with what hidden agenda – it was constructed in just this way. It is a trivial truth that the causes will be found in social conditions. All that remains is to suggest that these conditions are changeable and historical, and at once the authority of the institutions that grow from them is overshadowed. It becomes natural to suggest a new and rival agenda, a new system of power relations, and to jettison the ideological baggage required by the former system of power.

Yet this very independence of any particular social science, this ability to float free of any challengeable hypothesis, suggests to me that the insights of the radical critique are not hard-won. They issue with a kind of somnambulistic automatism, just as soon as the external viewpoint is adopted. Imagine a curriculum reformer arguing that traditional mathematics is a device for empowering a certain section of society, namely the mathematically competent, that it discriminates between those and the remainder, giving them a privileged access to careers, institutions, and the social world. In order to rectify this injustice, we must develop a new egalitarian mathematics that distributes advantage equally to all who study it. This new mathematics contains such axioms as $2 + 2 = 5$. Learning it confers no special advantage on the mathematically talented. Indeed, the new curriculum will disadvantage no one, or to put it another way, it will disadvantage everyone equally, which amounts to the same thing.

The example is absurd but not more absurd than recent proposals for a "feminist science," in which the aggressive masculine tendency towards theory and experiment is set aside in favor of more gentle pursuits, or the proposals for a feminist jurisprudence, in which the masculine emphasis on rights and duties under law is replaced by an attitude of caring and

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nurturing. The lesson we should draw from the example is simple. While traditional mathematics does confer power on those who master it, this is not its purpose. Those who study mathematics are guided by autonomous principles of mathematical thought, towards knowledge that is an end in itself. There is no way of building an alternative mathematics around some egalitarian agenda. To attempt to do so would be to replace mathematical by instrumental reasoning; the result would therefore not be mathematics. The subject of mathematics itself resists politicization, for the very reason that it is a field of knowledge.

The radical critique of the curriculum in the humanities likewise assumes the power relations that emerge from the traditional curriculum are part of an agenda, the real but hidden purpose of teaching things this way. This is to assume precisely what has yet to be proven: namely, that there is no knowledge contained in the traditional curriculum. With that unproven assumption goes another: that you can build a rival curriculum around a rival agenda and somehow be doing the same thing. However, the supposed agenda of the traditional curriculum is not an agenda at all. Such power relations as have resulted from studying it have not been the goal of study but its innocent byproduct. To construct a subject around a political agenda is precisely to relinquish the pursuit of knowledge and to abandon the claim to a place in the curriculum.

More interesting than the content of the radical curriculum, however, is its social effect. Those who have taught their students to reflect on the great works of civilization, and to enter into the critical relation with them that these works invite and encourage, never have had to worry that they were damaging their students or reducing their chances of success in life. There has emerged from the traditional study of the humanities a shared frame of reference, a body of substantive utterance and refined expression, an understanding of the past and its uses, that could be deployed in a thousand ways, allowing students to find their place among contemporaries and communicate with them on equal terms.

I do not think that we can have the same confidence in the future of those educated in the new curriculum, those who have learned nothing of literature except how to deconstruct it, who see nothing in traditional customs and institutions save the malign hand of patriarchal power; who have studied, in place of the classics of our literature, the ephemeral products of the moment, devoted to issues that seem of overwhelming importance today but will soon be alive only in universities and scarcely even there. The curriculum designed to empower the new classes and enable them to seize their inheritance is more likely to remove from them their only hope of competing on equal terms, by destroying the durable frame of reference and the web of human sympathy that make serious commu-

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nication across generations possible. In my view, this result is what we must expect, when we cease to treat education as an end in itself and regard it instead as an instrument of social engineering.

This is only a first step by way of a reply to the radicals. And it certainly will not satisfy them. For it is extremely difficult to demonstrate that there is real knowledge contained in the traditional curriculum, just as it is difficult to demonstrate that there is an objective morality or a valid method of legal reasoning, even though our society is founded on the assumption of both those things. And there is a further reason for thinking that the radicals will not be persuaded, one that goes to the heart of our present crisis. The traditional curriculum, I maintain, had no political agenda; the radical curriculum, by contrast, has nothing *but* its agenda. It makes appeal, certainly, to an objective social science. Yet the desire to discover the nature of that science is so feeble, in comparison with the desire that such a science should uphold the radical agenda, that the search to define it will never be honestly embarked upon. The political agenda comes first and generates a "will to believe" dictating the goal and the form of study.

It is here that we should look again at the conflict between philosophy and rhetoric. There are two ways of coming to an opinion. One, that of rational inquiry, has knowledge as its goal; the other, which makes use of rational inquiry only to the point where reason threatens it, aims at the identity and cohesion of a group. When Plato contrasted knowledge and opinion, and philosophy and rhetoric, as the paths to these disparate goals, he had something like this in mind: Some of our views come about through free inquiry. Others come to us stamped with the authority of a group, membership in which is of visceral significance to us. Religious opinions are of this second sort, but in an age of declining faith, politics takes the place of religion. Political opinions cease to be hesitant hypotheses and become ardent principles of faith. Group opinions are badges of membership. To utter them is to give voice to a password, securing your passage inwards, into the safety of a herd. Such opinions do not encounter refutation or dispute. On the contrary, they avoid dispute, by excluding the heretic, anathematizing him, and ensuring that his discourse will not be heard. Group opinions are also sacred opinions, and those who deny them are not to be refuted but destroyed.

Group opinions are useful. Not only do they foster the cohesion that enables people to seize power from their rivals, they also establish a reign of peace once power has been acquired. A society can coalesce around them as a hive around its queen. They are the supreme instrument of crowd control, and the demagogue who makes judicious use of them has a power that no mere philosopher could ever hope to obtain. It goes

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without saying, however, that they are a potential threat to education, as theology was when the Renaissance humanists first tried to dethrone it. Group opinions seal off certain areas of thought from free inquiry and establish barriers and channels to divert the course of reason and force it underground. This is one reason for the collapse of humane education in the Islamic world, and the growth of a new kind of uncritical frenzy in which the knowledge of what to feel and what to do has been miserably extinguished. Group opinions, though, are also necessary. Our human world is a shared form of life, and the concepts that we need in order to participate in that form of life derive in the end from a common fund of established beliefs and practices. It is a rare circumstance to find the project of free inquiry coexisting with the established beliefs that even the free spirit requires on life's journey. That rare circumstance has been ours, and it is the ideal of the *polis* as Plato envisioned it.

Humane education, I suggest, came about because of an inheritance that permitted and encouraged questions. It is the fruit of a free but unskeptical roaming in the human world, unburdened by science or dogma. The attitudes it promotes are not merely the attitudes of a group, nor do they have the cohesion of the group as their hidden purpose. Humane education casts its web of sympathy as widely as is humanly possible without losing the intellectual discipline required by knowledge, and it is implicitly universal in its appeal. The unique cultural conditions that permitted this liberty may now be vanishing.

If you study the writings and pronouncements of those who press for a radical and "empowering" curriculum (and who are not content to entrust the future to that process of continuous emendation and reform intrinsic to the tradition itself), you will be struck by the fact that their premises are precisely foregone conclusions. Propositions that once would have been hesitantly proposed and arduously argued for, which are barely intelligible except as the fruits of long controversy, are now adopted as unquestioned verities. We are told that traditional society is patriarchal, that women have been oppressed in Western culture by men, that homosexuality is morally indistinguishable from heterosexuality, that gender is nothing but a social construct – and a thousand other things that are in truth the flimsiest of speculations, yet which we are to accept unhesitatingly on pain of social exclusion. You can easily see that these are not rational beliefs but group opinions, and that those who dare to disagree with them in public will be forced into the role of enemies rather than disputants. The radical curriculum is not so much a reformed curriculum as an anti-curriculum, one designed to seize that fertile territory between science and dogma, so patiently opened up by nineteenth-century humanists, and once again to close it off from free inquiry.

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For the freedom we have enjoyed – the freedom to know the human world as it really is and not merely as the arena of our temporary passions – was predicated on a religious conviction that has since crumbled away. That old and unassuming religion is what Arnold, Eliot, and Leavis really had in mind when they wrote of "culture": the gentleness toward the human world that comes from a sense that we are safe in it. In place of this culture a new religious passion roams the world of scholarship, staking its non-negotiable claims in every area where science has not forbidden its ingress. The academy has become a recruiting ground for new forms of membership and, however short-lived and ridiculous the campus groupuscules may be, it will be hard to save the curriculum from their sacred purpose. For what they require is not knowledge but opinion, and opinion must be shut off from free inquiry in order to become the password of a group.

Science progresses, and scientific knowledge always grows. But knowledge of the human heart is more easily lost than won. It is the duty of the teacher to pass on what he knows, even when only one or two are ready to receive it. To accept the radical curriculum, I believe, is to renounce that duty and to connive at the loss of knowledge. This would matter less, were it not for the fact that the knowledge in question is the most valuable that we have.

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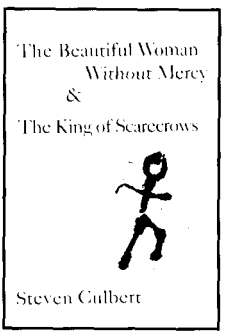

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

If you could tear yourself away from the Matisse exhibition, there was much more to be seen – some of it exhilarating, some exasperating – in New York's galleries last season. Shows of past and present artists, both celebrated and little-known, offered a wide range of alternatives to MoMA's triumphant retrospective. The most notorious was probably the Jean-Michel Basquiat exhibit. It raised a lot of hackles not merely because Basquiat's career spanned only eight years (he died before he was twenty-eight), nor because the show's scope and duration seemed disproportionate for so slight a subject – it occupied an entire floor of the Whitney for almost a month longer than Matisse was at the Modern. Much of the hostility was provoked by the way the Whitney used the Basquiat exhibition for its own political ends, to demonstrate its adherence to the pieties of academically-sanctioned multiculturalism and its freedom from institutional elitism.

Basquiat himself, a middle-class kid gone wrong, by most standards, was hailed as a counterculture hero, a shining role model for non-whites and non-Europeans. A booklet distributed gratis at the show, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: An Introduction for Students*, identified him as "one of the most successful black visual artists in history, even though his career was brief and it ended abruptly and tragically. He is one of only a small number of Hispanic-African-American artists to be recognized internationally." (If only he had been female or "physically challenged," but reports are that he was, at least, sexually broad-minded.) Part Haitian, part Puerto Rican, raised in Park Slope – not the ghetto, but you can't have everything – Basquiat was largely self-taught, his interest in art stimulated by his mother. The student guide tells us that he "began his career illegally painting images and words on buildings throughout the city." (Among reactionary types who care about public amenity, this used to be considered vandalism, rather than the beginning of a career as an artist, but never mind.) In 1970, at the age of twenty, Basquiat switched from defacing public monuments to more traditionally and potentially salable canvases and sheets of paper, so becoming a "fine artist."

The guide assures us that he became "quite knowledgeable about the history of art" and that "living artists were also important to him," especially his friend Andy Warhol. But it's Basquiat's success that really matters: "The critical reception of his paintings was strong and positive, the

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market for them enthusiastic, and prices soared." A note of caution: "His success as an artist, however, did not give him a sense of stability. In 1988, before reaching his twenty-eighth birthday, he died of a drug overdose."

The real question, of course, is not "How successful was Basquiat in the overheated art market of the 1980s?" or even "Was he a victim of that market?" but "How good was his art?" Retrospectives are supposed to settle the issue, but oddly, the Whitney's effort did little to clarify or expand what we already knew. Eight years' worth of what we must assume were carefully chosen Basquiats had no different impact than smaller, possibly more expedient shows at Tony Shafrazi's Soho gallery or the collection at Eli Broad's private museum in Santa Monica. Basquiat wasn't an irredeemably bad painter. He wasn't any kind of colorist, but if anything, his accumulations of words, masks, figures, cartoons, and skeletons are put together almost too skillfully, certainly too stylishly. Basquiat's pictures are superficially rude, brash, and spontaneous, with a flavor of the street, but they prove to be self-conscious and calculated. They have the manner of outrageousness rather than the fact. Childish foot-stamping supplants real anger; the predictable conventions of *art brut* replace real rawness.

The Whitney's text panels declared that Basquiat employed a personal litany of historical, literary, and street references to express his rage at persistent racial and social inequities around the world. The panels laboriously explained his allusions and stressed the individuality of his voice, the depth of his anger. The state of present-day society must be of deep concern to any black person – or any thinking person of any race – but the randomness of Basquiat's references subverted any thesis of profound engagement. Arbitrary associations of word and image, scattershot juxtapositions, read less as manifestations of outrage than as desperate efforts to attract attention. And I kept being reminded, above all, of other art. Basquiat's compositions, his gestures, shapes, and even his ways of putting on paint are not so much expressive imperatives as adroit evocations of artists he presumably encountered and admired during his course of self-education. Early Pollock, Gottlieb, Dubuffet, Twombley, and Miró were present, albeit brutalized and set on fast-forward, along with less exalted sources ranging from anatomical illustrations to the bombastic flourishes of Matthieu and the Cobra group. The effect wasn't even of modish, ironic appropriation, but of simple pastiche, graduate art-school level, at best.

I kept thinking of Flaubert's dictum that the artist make his life as simple as possible in order to make his art as extreme as possible. Matisse subscribed to this notion, too, living, for the most part, a life of exemplary dullness. Yet in his art, he ventured to the furthest limits of invention and

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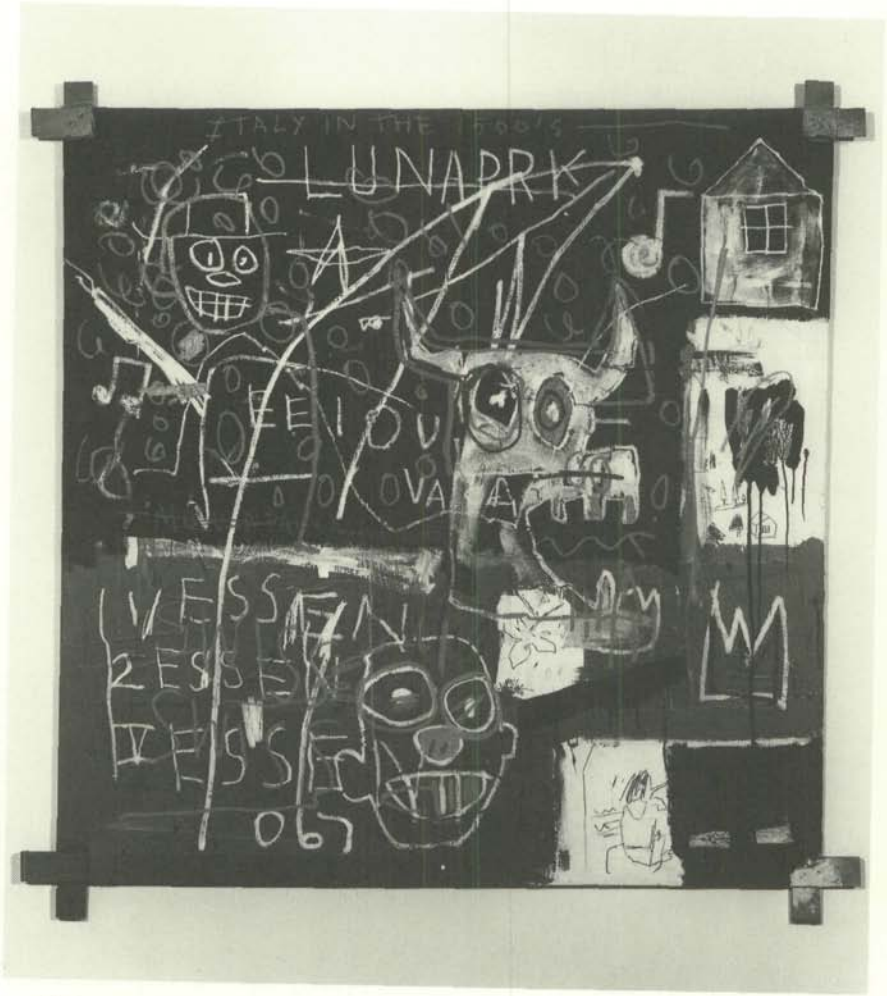

Lnaprk (1982) by Jean-Michel Basquiat. Synthetic polymer and oil stick on canvas. 73 1/2 x 72 1/4 inches. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art. © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

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innovation. Basquiat never got close. Of course, he was horribly young and by all reports, in pretty desperate shape when he overdosed, but given the evidence of the show, it's hard to imagine how his small talent might have further evolved. That only makes the story of his short, violent life even sadder and the Whitney's effort to elevate him to a new pantheon of American artists more pathetic.

By coincidence, *Frederic Bazille: Prophet of Impressionism*, at the Brooklyn Museum from mid-November through January (and in Memphis at the Dixon Gallery through April 25th), offered a nineteenth-century parallel to Basquiat's story. Bazille also died far too young, killed in the Franco-Prussian War before he was twenty-nine. His career as a painter similarly spanned a brief eight years, but instead of the superabundance of Basquiat's legacy, only sixty-five of Bazille's works survive. He doesn't figure in the popular notion of Impressionism, since he died before the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, but he was an intimate friend and sometime studio- and roommate of Manet, Monet, Renoir, and Sisley. (He's that tall, lanky fellow in the group portraits of the Impressionist circle at the Musée d'Orsay.) Pissarro described him as "one of the gifted among us." Until the exhibit in Brooklyn, a version of a retrospective organized by the Musée Fabre, Montpellier, to commemorate the one hundred-fiftieth anniversary of his birth in 1841, Bazille was anything but familiar to American audiences. The show and its excellent, well-researched catalogue should change that.

Bazille emerged as clearly talented, serious, intelligent, and *young*, a little cautious but receptive to the advice of his more daring contemporaries. Manet's example, like that of the young Monet, was evident in the juicy paint-handling and forthright approach of some fine still lifes, while a couple of ambitious paintings of young women seated outdoors and some fresh landscapes made it plain that he learned a good deal from Corot and Courbet, as well. But Bazille seems to have listened too much to his good friend Renoir. A large orientalizing painting of three women, a study in the contrast between black and white skin, nudity and exotic costume, fur and flesh, betrayed a sentimentality and a softening of touch that suggest the ascendancy of Renoir's influence.

On the whole, the most modest pictures bore out Pissarro's judgment: a lush, painterly still life of two golden herrings, a sensitive portrait of an African woman with a vase of flowers, a studio interior – homage to Delacroix and Corot – and the intensely colored, intensely felt landscapes, with their nod to Courbet. Bazille's last large figure paintings, such as the oriental fantasy, were aimed at the Salon, which, along with Renoir's example, may explain his retreat from bold brushiness and a direct attack. The increasing conservatism of this "late" work made the characterization

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African Woman with Peonies (Négresse aux Pivoines) (1870) by Frederic Bazille. Oil on canvas. 23 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches. Collection of Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France. Courtesy of The Dixon Gallery and Gardens.

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of Bazille as "Prophet of Impressionism" hard to defend. Yet one of the most original, if awkward, pictures was a group of male bathers on a sunlit riverbank, an odd painting that combined inventiveness, experimentation, incipient slickness, and ineptitude in an extraordinary way, and was accepted for exhibition at the Salon of 1870.

Bazille made no great paintings in his tragically short career, but he produced some very good ones – no mean achievement. The solidity of his work, the sense of search, and the evidence of growing mastery of materials and enlarging ambition suggest that he could well have become a painter to be reckoned with. His surviving work may not be prophetic of Impressionism, but what we think of as Impressionism might have been even more diverse if that Prussian bullet had missed its mark.

Different as they were, the Bazille and Basquiat shows both reminded us of the intimate link between real maturity and mature art. The Giorgio Morandi and Hans Hofmann exhibitions emphasized the point. At Baldacci-Daverio Gallery, Morandi's magically still, pellucid images were testimony to how years of intense scrutiny can extract poetry from the most banal experience, while the Hofmanns at André Emmerich Gallery were proof of the rewards of a lifetime's serious thinking and uninhibited practice.

Morandi's work depends on wordless, fragile visual relationships, on solemn considerations of nuance, of tiny shifts in tone, shape, and surface, minutely adjusted and compellingly presented. The still lifes are all surface, almost wholly frontal, intimate but monumental. And while you rapidly become familiar with the particular character of Morandi's protagonists – the oil cans, pitchers, vases, and bottles – you are equally aware of their *paintedness*. The best pictures are often clumsy, artless, as though they came into being through the exercise of sheer will, not craft. In the drawings, a few tremulous lines and some hatching can call up a whole table-top world, with overtones of architecture or geological phenomena. (Guston's drawings, even the cartoon-y late ones with the Klansmen and the shoes, owe a great deal to Morandi's, in their economy, their ferocity, their concentration.)

Perhaps the most surprising work in the show was a 1954 canvas, *Courtyard*: a group of unlovely stucco buildings and a steep staircase were reduced to essentials, jammed together like a still life, and unified by creamy ochre and rose paint. A blank wall slices off the right-hand side of the picture, further compressing the architecture, making the casual view urgent and somehow turning an undistinguished fragment of Italian vernacular into a metaphor for Morandi's own single-minded, focused, circumscribed life. The show was accompanied by a handsome, well-illustrated catalogue with an essay by Paolo Baldacci that suffered from too

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literal a translation from the Italian, but it provided an insightful overview of Morandi's career.

The Hofmann exhibition, ranging over several decades and through this protean artist's multiple conceptions of what a picture could be, similarly demonstrated the advantages of long life and perseverance. A sturdy, freely-drawn studio interior and a classic (and beautiful) "block" picture, glowing blue and gold rectangles against a murky ground, competed for attention with a group of explosive little "spot and splash" paintings, while an oddball picture of staccato red and green dabs slowly declared itself. The only constant in Hofmann's work is the youthful energy and exuberance, the sense of discovery and improvisation that characterize everything he touched, cutting across years, scale, medium, and even considerations of quality. He is almost always a challenging artist, often a great one, and without fail, an interesting one. Emmerich's annual January show of Hofmann's work has kept us informed of the breadth of this late-blooming master's achievement, offering opportunities to see familiar and unfamiliar works in new combinations and contexts. There are always surprises. It's a show that consistently sets a high standard – a marvelous way to start the new year.

The show perhaps most unlike the Basquiat exhibition was to be found at the Whitney itself – the long-promised Agnes Martin retrospective. If Basquiat's self-indulgent scrawls are paradigms of the excessive 1980s, Martin's pictures are emblems of the 1990s: meticulous, bleached, held-back, un-sexy – the paintings of self-denial. Martin enjoys near-sanctified status these days. She's a sort of Georgia O'Keeffe of minimalism. Her age, her reticence, her withdrawal from New York to the Southwest elicit as much awe from her admirers as her austere pictures do. I should say that while I take Martin seriously, I've never subscribed to the belief that her work possesses any special transcendental quality: the retrospective did nothing to change my mind. What did become evident is how much her work is about process – the slow repetition of predetermined lines, the building up and washing away of all-but-invisible grids on supports of uniform size or proportion. At best, it's something like Zen meditation, mind-numbing disciplines akin to chanting or gravel-raking that take the participant out of the realm of time. At worst, the repetitions seem obsessive, the result of compulsion or an unyielding desire to control.

Martin's pictures are sometimes beautiful, always restrained, often to the point of deadness. Yet for all their cool anonymity, handmadeness prevails, dominating the early work and revealing itself even in the most held-back late works, if they are seen from close enough. They are undeniably elegant, but do these subtle, uniformly inflected, uniformly sized expanses have an effect any different from, for example, a sheet of ravish-

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ing Japanese handmade paper with its faint irregularities and screen marks? I'm not sure that they do. There are such a lot of givens in a Martin: size, proportion, scale, visual weight. The pictures seem the result of a program rather than of intuitive discovery.

What puzzles me is that Martin's work is presumed to deal with universal metaphysical issues, while that of other abstract painters who explore related notions of expanses, minimal inflection, and subtly nuanced color, such as Kenneth Noland or Jules Olitski, is dismissed as empty or decorative. I suppose Martin's grids, repetitions, and unchanging six-foot squares could be construed as evidence of rigor, while Noland and Olitski's alertness to the variables of process, their courting of the unexpected, could be seen as sensual and anti-intellectual. Yet these same accusations of "mere" decorativeness have been leveled at Matisse, arguably the most visually intelligent artist of the twentieth century. A perceptive painter friend recently said she was struck by the respect accorded Martin's frequently quoted remark that she wanted her art to be like the ocean, since no one gets tired of looking at the ocean, when Matisse's wish that his art refresh "the mental worker" the way a good armchair refreshes the physical worker has been treated as evidence of trivial intentions.

Grouping Martin's canvases, as the Whitney show did, makes subtle differences more evident and more communicative. Being surrounded by these tranquil "fields" for contemplation can be quite pleasurable, which suggests, ironically, that claims for spiritual significance notwithstanding, Martin is just a good decorator. It was hard to see, however, why the last group of white pictures at the Whitney was given such prominence – something to do with the machinations of art dealers, I was later told – while the entire installation was marred by glaring white "aprons" projecting from the foot of each wall. Against the Whitney's shiny slate floor, they were especially objectionable, distracting the eye from the paintings they were meant to protect.

Two exhibitions dealing with what are now called "marginalized" artists were among the most informative and engaging of the season. *El Taller Torres-García: The School of the South and Its Legacy* was seen at the Bronx Museum for the Arts, part of a tour that included Madrid, Austin, Texas, and Mexico City. The Uruguayan-born painter, Joaquín Torres-García, on whom the show hinges, is best known for abstractions combining shorthand images, personal symbols, and "alphabets," ordered like words on a page by elegantly proportioned grids. Painted in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, these conflations of ideal geometry and the everyday reflect both Torres-García's affection for the vernacular and his close relationship with such purists as Theo Van Doesberg and Mondrian.

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The show dealt not with the Paris period, however, but with the last fifteen years of Torres-García's life – 1934 to 1949 – when he returned to Uruguay, aged sixty, after forty-three years spent mostly in Europe, to bring the message of modernism to Latin America. "El Taller Torres-García" was the workshop-school he founded in his effort to foster a new modernist art of the Americas, a synthesis of geometric abstraction, constructivist principles, and the Pre-Columbian legacy, which would encompass everything from monumental architecture to mural decoration to domestic furniture and utilitarian objects. "The School of the South" loosely describes the artists associated with him in this undertaking. Both are all too unfamiliar. This exhibition and its excellent, comprehensive catalogue, in fact, are the first efforts to reconstruct the history and philosophy of the Taller Torres-García, its influential founder, and the artists it trained and encouraged.

Paintings, sculptures, constructions, pottery, marvelous painted furniture, and more, formed equally out of high-minded abstraction and a taste for the handmade, charted the expansiveness and pervasiveness of Torres-García's ideas. The show demonstrated, too, the course of instruction at the Taller and its long-term influence on Latin American art. It was absorbing, and much of the work was on a high level, but the show, in some ways, was tantalizing. Many of the group's early efforts have been lost, and more important, their most ambitious projects, monumental murals and decorative schemes for architecture, were represented, of necessity, only by catalogue photos. Still, a portrait emerged of an immensely serious collective effort: a circle of talented, passionate idealists who banded together to create a new universal language, unique to the American experience, wholly modern but independent of technology – a kind of modernist arts and crafts movement. It was a brave experiment that produced some remarkable work. Together, the exhibition and its catalogue formed a splendid, appetite-whetting introduction to this obscure but fascinating chapter in the history of modernism.

The provocative January-February exhibition at Kraushaar Gallery, *Significant Others: Artist Wives of Artists*, examined the art of women who have been defined largely in relation to their spouses, rather than as practitioners in their own right. It was sobering to see how many were all but unknown, after more than twenty years of assiduous feminist research. Some, such as Helen Torr (Arthur Dove's wife) were familiar to specialists. Only a handful had substantial reputations of their own, such as Dorothy Dehner, who is increasingly recognized as an original sculptor and draughtsman, albeit one closely linked to David Smith, her husband for almost twenty-five years. They shared a grounding in Cubist and Surrealist ideas, and there's even evidence that Dehner's influence on

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Smith was considerable. At least one wife was actually better known than her husband: the celebrated African-American sculptor, painter, and teacher Elizabeth Catlett, who has a far larger following in this country, at any rate, than her Mexican artist-husband, Francisco Mora.

Sometimes, I am afraid, obscurity seemed deserved, but there were happy surprises. Admirers of Jacob Lawrence's work have long known that his wife, Gwendolyn Knight, was a serious painter, but there has been little opportunity to see her work. Knight's engaging little New Orleans streetscapes of 1941 were distinguished by their immediacy, crisp color, and clear structure. Knight's urban genre themes are related to Lawrence's, but she has a distinct and individual voice.

The question of influence is delicate. Rebecca James, the photographer Paul Strand's wife, was close to such pioneer modernists as Georgia O'Keeffe and Marsden Hartley, and their helpful example is arguably visible in her serene flower paintings. Yet James allowed her flowers to remain flowers, instead of turning them, as O'Keeffe did, into ambiguous abstractions. Similarly, a vase of pansies, while composed like one of Hartley's deadpan, confrontational still lifes, was made wholly personal by its subtle color and cool elegance.

I've always found some "significant others" more interesting than their artist husbands, so it was good to see them presented for their own merits. Gertrude Greene is one; her constructivist works of the 1930s demonstrated both her individuality and her allegiance to the purist geometry of the American Abstract Artists (AAA) group, to which her husband Balcomb Greene also belonged before he reverted to wispy figuration. Marguerite Zorach, an extremely wide-ranging, inventive artist – far more so, to my eye, than her sculptor husband – is another in this category. (I was surprised to find the Russian-born Esphyr Slobodkina, a founding member of AAA and an accomplished constructivist, in the Kraushaar show; it seems she was briefly married to Ilya Bolotowsky.)

Some inclusions were simply curiosities, such as the Ashcan School-type illustrations in the manner of their famous husbands by Florence Scovel Shinn and Marjorie Organ (Robert Henri's wife). Others, while more ambitious, were no less indebted to the husband's example. Sally Michel's charming landscapes inevitably recall Milton Avery's. It is well to remember, though, that Avery's public career was dependent on Michel's supporting the family as an illustrator, instead of concentrating on her "serious" painting, but that's a matter for another, much longer essay. There were intelligent exclusions – we don't need to see any more O'Keeffes or Kahlos for a while – but also obvious lacunae, and some less than ideal examples, inevitable when a commercial gallery, however distinguished, undertakes a show that really requires the resources and clout of a museum to pry loose the perfect selection of works. Suzy

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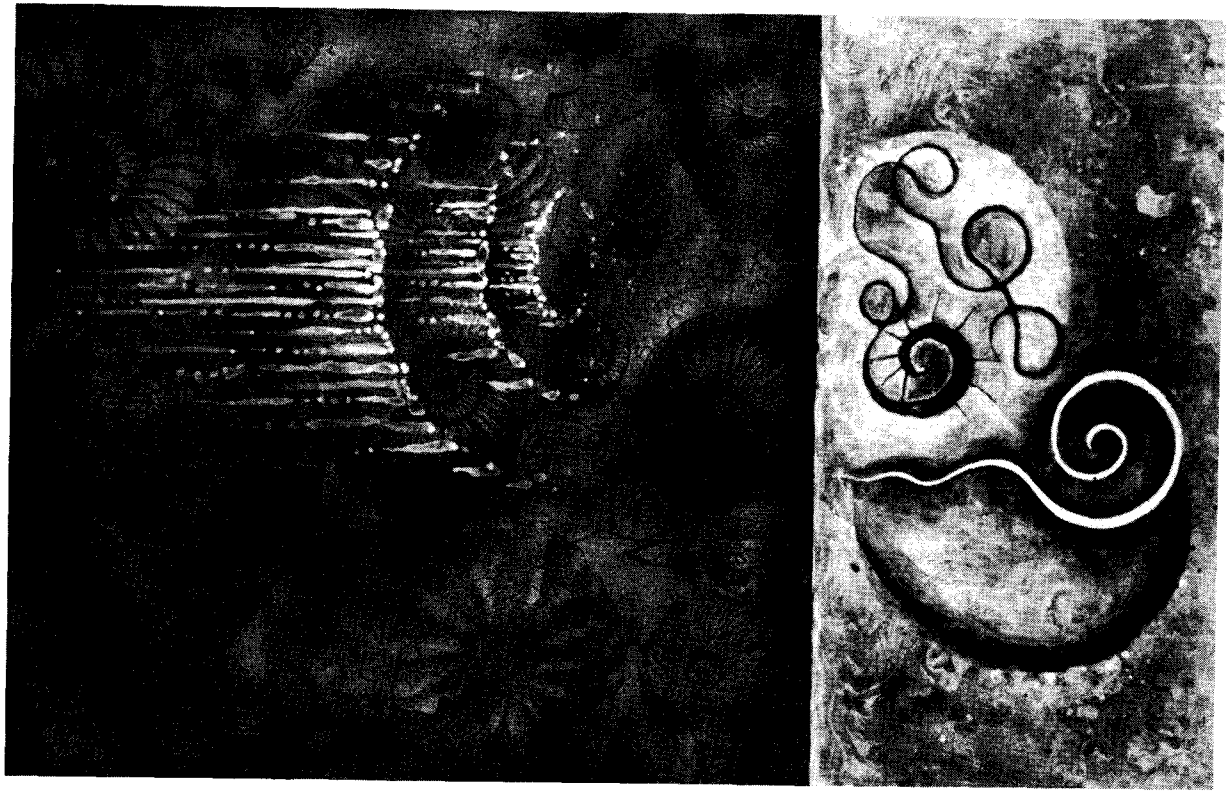

Paradisiacal Trine (1992) by Peggy Cyphers. Acrylic, sand, diamond dust, lithographic collage, canvas on board. 72 x 48 inches. Courtesy of E. M. Donahue Gallery.

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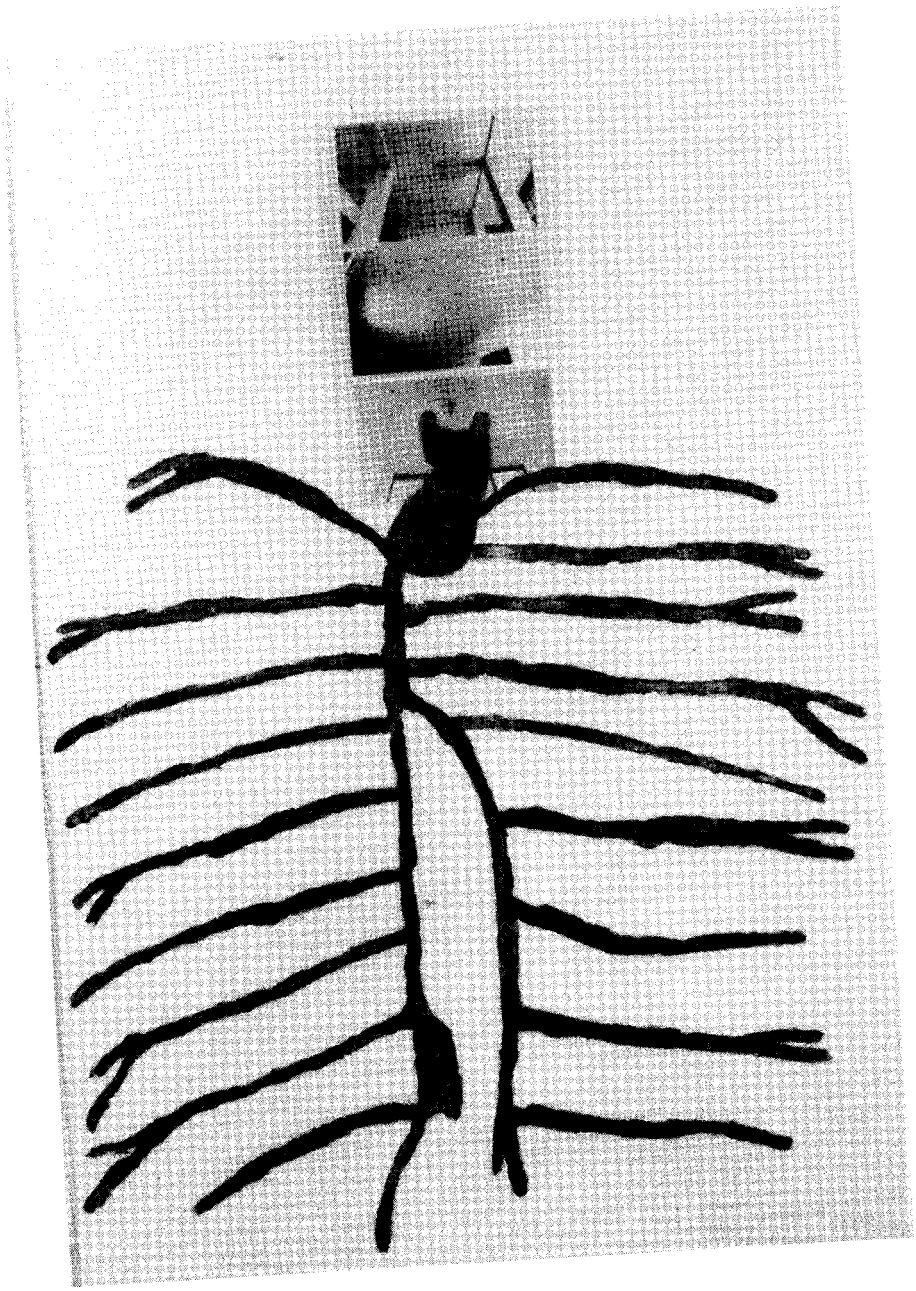

Untitled (1992) by Shelagh Keeley. Charcoal, resin, photo on paper. 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of John Gibson Gallery.

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Frelinghuysen (George L. K. Morris's wife) was conspicuously absent, for example. But the show raised important questions about influence and originality, the role of women in twentieth-century America, the meaning of professionalism in the modern-day art world, and much more. These questions, like the concept of the show itself, warrant more exhaustive investigation. Kraushaar Gallery is to be applauded for initiating this research. Maybe some smart museum will continue to probe the issues.

The cynical will point out that a desire to reclaim ignored or forgotten artists can be prompted by intellectual curiosity, a sense of history, or the pressures of the marketplace, and that the group show, however scholarly, is the refuge of the prudent nowadays. It protects an art dealer from having to commit to a single artist or even a single approach. Certainly, dismal group shows abound, paeans to randomness, often selected by guest curators, themselves usually practicing artists. Not that a coherent theme is any guarantee of quality – witness the ambitiously titled *Nineties* at John Gibson Gallery this winter. If it was an accurate view of this decade, things are worse than I thought.

Dreary accumulations of stuff prevailed, piles of everyday objects – like a pathologically untidy teenager's room. Eve Andrée Laramee strewed cast lead hearts (anatomical, not valentine) on the floor, *à la* Kiki Smith, accompanying them with something like the set-up for a high school chemistry experiment. Cameron Gregg tied bits of unprepossessing detritus neatly with string and hung them up as a sort of calendar, a record of thirty days' worth of *trouvailles*. Someone trashed a bicycle and studded it with little trees made of sponge – the kind you see in crude architectural models – to comment on the environment. I think this was associated with a wreath of dead flowers, but it was hard to tell where one piece ended and another began.

I was surprised to see two drawings by Sheelagh Keeley, an artist who has interested me for some time, in this company. Her juxtapositions of dreamily blurred anatomical drawings – here bronchial tubes – and crisp geometrical interiors were not the most compelling Keeleys I've seen. She has explored related anatomical imagery, as well as tribal and prehistoric allusions at scales ranging from site-specific wall drawings to intimate books, with greater subtlety and inventiveness, but compared to those mindless heaps of cobblestones and peculiar machinery, Keeley's works looked like masterpieces.

The themes of the works in *Nineties*, whatever the show's weaknesses, are certainly current and probably real. Concern for the environment and dissatisfaction with contemporary urban life compete with despair over AIDS these days. *Repair Work*, a curious effort of the Organization of

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Independent Artists, whose exhibits regularly crop up in all sorts of places, dealt with these themes more trenchantly and more effectively than did the *Nineties* show. Curated by two of the participants, Thelma Matthias and Eva Montell, the show asked seven artists "to create site-specific installations about the concept of 'repair' – to the earth and its inhabitants, to human behavior and to the spirit." The responses were, not unexpectedly, varied.

Evan Penny's drawings of staggeringly enlarged skin creases were obsessive and slightly creepy. More potent was his "negative" sculpture, a pile of sand imprinted with a fragment of a gigantic classical head. Viewing it was like being inside a model of the Statue of Liberty during the casting process, and, while effective, it raised more questions about the nature of classicism, about the eternal versus the ephemeral, than about ecology. Eva Mantell's evocation of an idyllic if tattered beach scene, constructed of market umbrellas in various states of disrepair, suggested the possibility of temporary protection, while Margaret Lanzetta's mass of water goblets, filled with clear liquid on which floated golden powder, was at once alluring and repellent, hence thought-provoking.

What gave the installation its spin was the site – the lobby of 31 West 52nd Street, a sleek Kevin Roche tower that concisely symbolizes corporate values. (Since 1989, The Lobby Gallery has invited ten arts groups annually to exhibit there, through altruism or through zoning bonuses awarded to developers for providing public amenities.) The artists were, of course, fully aware of the ironies inherent in the location, and they discussed them in a symposium, "Sculpture Addressing Social Issues in the Corporate Context," which I suspect was a stimulating exchange.

Peggy Cyphers's solo exhibition, *Lexicons of Paradise*, organized by E. M. Donahue Gallery, explored similar issues and was similarly sited in an "alternative" location – the New York Academy of Science, a setting more sympathetic to the artist's concerns than a corporate lobby but visually challenging. Cyphers exhibited work dealing with environmental and feminist messages. The former, infinitely the more successful, depend on quoted images of the rare, the precious, the fragile, the threatened, the extinct, "stifled" by layers of sensuous paint. In the best, you discover these images by seeing into and through the surface, so that real tension exists between message and means. The surface becomes continuous, Cyphers's quotations and private "handwritten" symbols knit together, to make a fluctuating, suggestive whole. When she fails to achieve this kind of integration, paint remains paint, and the appropriated images simply appear to have been decorated. In her feminist works, Cyphers equates female display, symbolized by photos of heavily made-up women of the 1960s, with mating displays in the animal world. It's pretty obvious. The

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best of the ecological pictures criticize the feminist pictures, since the ecological works operate on a variety of levels, make their point slowly, and reward attention.

One of the oddest of last season's offerings was the Leonid Lerman show at David McKee Gallery. The Soviet-born Lerman paints parodic images that question the meaning of modernism, forcing late Malevich figures, those awful streamlined peasants that were Malevich's response to political pressure, into modernist icons – Van Gogh fields, Monet gardens – or traditional ones – Vermeer interiors. He plays similar games by altering beach scenes by William Merrit Chase or dividing a Monet landscape into Malevich squares. No one is safe, from Grant Wood on. I would dismiss Lerman's conceits at best as witty one-liners, except for having been stopped dead by his transformation of George Caleb Bingham's marvelous *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*. There, the contrast between the luminous, utterly still scene and Malevich's ominous black square, "held" by the rear paddler, produced a genuine air of mystery. The reflection of the trappers and the animal in the canoe persists, and the altered image becomes poetic, uncanny, reverberant. I was surprised by how convincing I found this picture, but as some of us have always said, art is a matter of experience.

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ARMANDO LAGO

Psychiatry and Torture in Cuba

Until recently the world's attention on psychiatric abuse was centered on the former Soviet Union, where Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway reported, in their seminal book *Psychiatric Terror* in 1977, three hundred sixty-five cases in a population of three hundred million Soviet citizens. Scant attention has been paid to the psychiatric abuse of political dissidents in Castro's Cuba. In a two-year study, culminating in our book, *The Politics of Psychiatry in Revolutionary Cuba* (Transaction Books, 1991), Charles J. Brown and I found sixty-three cases of Cuban political dissidents interned in psychiatric hospitals, who had been subjected to torture with electroshock treatments and high doses of psychotropic drugs. This data, compiled from *samizdat* publications smuggled out by human rights groups inside Cuba, shows a rate of psychiatric abuse in Cuba six times greater than in the former Soviet Union.

We analyzed only thirty-one of the Cuban cases we found, concentrating on dissidents now living in the United States and on cases that could be verified by Amnesty International and America Watch files. Our strategy of following only thirty-one cases, those we could verify using outside sources, was necessary in order to minimize the possibility of our findings being sabotaged by the Cuban Department of State Security, the Cuban KGB. The analysis of the cases revealed a systematic pattern of torture using psychiatric methods. Eleven dissidents were forced to undergo electroshock treatments, some receiving as many as twenty-four sessions. Sixteen dissidents were forced to ingest high doses of psychotropic drugs, mainly chlorpromazine (Thorazine), in two cases for periods as long as five years. Dissidents of all ages were subjected to such psychiatric tortures, from the sixteen-year-old Jose Luis Alvarado, who received three electroshock sessions and high doses of drugs after a failed attempt to gain asylum in the Colombian Embassy in Havana, to the businessman Eugenio de Sosa, who at the age of sixty-one received fourteen electroshock sessions as punishment for smuggling messages from prison. While a wide variety of professions and occupations were represented in the database, two groups stood out: students (five cases) and-journalists and writers (six cases).

The political nature of the offenses that landed the dissidents in the psychiatric hospitals is clear. Eight dissidents were interned after unsuccessful attempts to leave Cuba illegally; another ten were interned for

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unspecified counterrevolutionary activities; eight were accused of writing anti-Castro graffiti and distributing human rights leaflets. The others were accused of a variety of offenses, including contempt for the regime, refusal to serve in the armed forces, and alleged participation in plots to assassinate Castro.

Most of these abuses took place in the Castellanos and Carbo-Serviá wards of the Havana Psychiatric Hospital, in the Gustavo Machín Hospital in Santiago de Cuba, and in the Combinado del Este Prison Hospital in a suburb of Havana. The forensic wards of these hospitals are under the direct control of State Security officials. The duration of confinement ranged from three days to five years. Cuban penal law allows for placing prisoners for up to one month in the Havana Psychiatric Hospital for the purpose of psychiatric diagnosis, but in more than half the cases the period of internment exceeded one month, and four of the dissidents were interned for more than one year. Only eleven of the cases we investigated were diagnosed by the Cuban authorities as suffering from mental illness. Three cases never received a psychiatric evaluation, and four others were diagnosed as sane but were nevertheless sent back to the psychiatric wards. One case was diagnosed as "apathetic to socialism," and another as suffering from "delusions of being a defender of human rights."

The thirty-one dissidents subjected to psychiatric abuse were classified in our study into four types. In the first group were eleven dissidents who, without prior history of mental illness, were interned with criminally insane patients during their interrogation, with the objective of breaking them down and obtaining confessions. Although they did not receive electroshock sessions or drugs, they remembered the experience as hellish. Juan Manuel Garcia Cao, age twenty, was interned for three days in the Havana Psychiatric Hospital for writing anti-Castro leaflets. He says that his experiences at the psychiatric hospital were the worst of his three years in prison: "It was like Dante's Inferno. Fights broke out among the inmates continually. Some detainees were raped. The patients were sedated, as heavy doses of tranquilizers were mixed in with the food." Dr. Ariel Hidalgo, a professor of philosophy, was interned for ten days at the Havana Psychiatric Hospital when a search of his home uncovered a draft of his book criticizing Marxist philosophy. At the hospital, Hidalgo witnessed rapes and mutilations of internees by criminally insane patients acting under orders from the authorities. He was unable to sleep, fearing for his personal safety. His fear was not unwarranted. In March 1990, the dissident Angel Thomas Quinones, a thirty-nine-year old auto mechanic, was hanged by criminally insane patients at the Havana Psychiatric Hospital, who later burned his body.

A second group of fifteen dissidents without prior history of mental illness were interned in psychiatric hospitals to receive electroshocks and

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high doses of psychotropic drugs as punishment for their political opinions and activities. The case of Eugenio de Sosa is typical: "My first encounter with group electroshock treatments occurred one night when I saw a team of four men, directed by one named Mederos who was dressed as an orderly, enter the ward. Six patients were grabbed and rubber pieces stuffed into their mouths. They were thrown to the floor in a row side by side. Right there, on the floor, the electrodes were applied to both sides of their heads and the shocks were applied. The six bodies started to contort one by one. . . . The shocks were applied to the temples of the patients, but to me they applied most of the shocks to my testicles instead." In a television interview with WLTV-TV in Miami, de Sosa said the electroshocks "felt like thunder, an explosion." He also relates that during his five-month stay at the psychiatric hospital, he witnessed numerous cases where young dissidents interned at the Havana Psychiatric Hospital for writing anti-Castro graffiti, the oldest of whom was no more than sixteen, were systematically gang-raped by more than thirty criminally insane patients in the ward.

A third group consisting of two cases were political dissidents with mild mental illnesses who were subjected to electroshock treatments, high doses of psychotropic drugs, or both, as punishment for political behavior – treatments that are contrary to standard therapeutic procedures for such mild symptoms. Marcos Miranda, a television scriptwriter, was fired from his job at the Cuban Institute for Radio and Television when he refused to become an agent for the Department of State Security and spy on his coworkers. Hounded and blackmailed by the security apparatus, suffering from stress and tension, Miranda was interned at the Enrique Cabrera General Hospital. At the hospital, he was accused of faking his illness to avoid work and given seven electroshocks.

The final group consisted of three cases where political dissidents suffering from mental illnesses were denied their rights as patients because of their political beliefs. Their illnesses do not justify the large doses of psychotropic drugs to which they were subjected over long periods of time, exposing them to the danger of ongoing chemically-induced symptoms similar to the effects of lobotomization; such methods are similar to the way many Soviet dissidents were treated. The barbaric conditions under which the electroshock treatments were administered are also unjustified: without anesthesia, on wet floors covered with vomit, urine, and excrement, without muscle relaxants used to avoid bone fractures, and after dousing their bodies with cold water to increase electrical conductivity. One example of these horrible practices is the case of Jose Morales, who received electroshocks while submerged in a water tank used to hold drinking water for cattle.

While electroconvulsive therapy can be appropriate for some mental

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illnesses, such as severe depression and catatonic schizophrenia, in Cuba this therapeutic practice is applied systematically as punishment for political behavior, without medical supervision, and under the barbaric conditions described above. The effect of the electroshocks on the victims is heartbreaking. Roberto Bahamonde, an agricultural engineer, received eight electroshock sessions in 1975, after being interned in the Havana Psychiatric Hospital as punishment for writing Fidel Castro a private letter recommending that material incentives be adopted by the Castro government. In an interview with George Gedda of the Associated Press, Bahamonde said, "It took me years to recover. I recognized my family, but there were friends whose names I did not remember. . . . You lose your memory. You can't even remember people's names. I thought I would even forget what I learned in the university. . . . But little by little, I got my memory back. I think now I'm all right." Jesus Leyva Guerra, a union organizer, received twenty-four electroshocks as punishment for his human rights activities. In a Miami television interview, Leyva Guerra stated that after one electroshock session he did not recognize his wife or his relatives.

The extrapyramidal side effects of the psychotropic drugs affect the functions of the brain responsible for normal movement and coordination. The side effects can include slowness, rigidity, inhibition of body movement, and a condition known as tardive dyskinesia, characterized by involuntary movements of the lips, tongue and face. These secondary effects begin to appear in nonpsychotic persons at dosage levels much lower than those used for mentally ill people. The effect of such dosages on nonpsychotic individuals is described by Jose Luis Alvarado, the sixteen-year-old dissident referred to earlier: "I was forced to take psychotropic drugs three times daily. . . . The reaction was immediate. You felt like everything around you was losing its animation. You felt far away. You could walk, eat and talk, but they were involuntary reflexes. The moment would come when you could not remember your name – neither your name, nor that of the friend beside you. It was like being awake and dreaming at the same time."

The time has come to insist that the Castro government stop its psychiatric abuse practices in Cuba. The Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations, the United Nations Committee on Torture, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and the American Psychiatric Association should investigate these cases of psychiatric abuse in Cuba. Political, intellectual and religious leaders should protest these human rights violations. The international community should not remain silent. The barbaric practice of abuse of psychiatry for political purposes in Cuba must come to an end.

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POEMS

W. S. MERWIN

White Morning

On nights toward the end of summer at some time the mist
has gathered in the oaks the box thickets the straggling
eglantines it has moved like a hand unable to believe
the face it touches over the velvet of wild thyme
and the vetches sinking with the weight of dew it has found
its way without sight into the hoof prints of cows
the dark nests long empty the bark hanging alone the narrow
halls among stones and has held it all in a cloud
unseen the whole night as in a mind where I came
when it was turning white and I was holding a thin
wet branch wrapped in lichens because all I had thought
I knew had to be passed from branch to branch through the empty
sky and whatever I reached then and could recognize
moved toward me out of the cloud and was still the sky
where I went on looking until I was standing on
what seemed the wide wall along the lane past the hazel grove
we went to one day to cut handles that would last
the crows were calling around me to white air
I could hear their dripping wings and small birds with lights
breaking in their tongues the cold soaked through me I was able
after that morning to believe songs that once
would have been opaque to me I saw a carriage go under
the oaks there in full day to vanish I watched animals
in the shade I sat there with friends they have all disappeared
most of the stories have to do with vanishing

Forgotten Streams

The names of unimportant streams have fallen
into oblivion the syllables have been lost
but the streams that never went by name never raised the question
whether what has been told and forgotten is in
another part of oblivion from what was never remembered

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no one any longer recalls the Vaurs and the Divat
the stream Siou Sujou Suzou and everyone
for whom those were the names they have all become
the stream of Lherm we do not speak the same language
from one generation to another we
can tell little of places where we ourselves have lived
from the beginning and still less of neighborhoods
where our parents were young or the parents of our friends
how can we say what the sound of the voices was or what
the skins felt like and those mouths everything that the mouths did
the tongues the ears the eyes the animals the fur
the warmth as they breathed not far from here an unknown
mason dug up a sword five hundred years old
the only thing that is certain about it now
is that in the present age it is devoured with rust
something keeps going on without looking back

Commemoratives

This was the day when the guns fell silent one time
on old calendars before I was born then the bells
clanged to say it was over forever again
and again as they would every year when the same
hour had found the yellow light in the poplars
tan leaves of sycamores drifting across the square
out of the world and those who remembered the day
it was first over sat around tables holding
reflections in their hands thinking here we are
while the speeches reverberated in their faces
here we are we lived these are our faces now we are singing
these are ourselves standing out under the same trees
smoking talking of money we are the same we lived
with our moustaches our broadening features our swellings
at the belt our eyes from our time and in that chill air
of November with its taste of bronze I took the winding
road up the mountain until it hissed in the chestnut forest
where once the hunters had followed the edge of the ice
I came to sounds of a stream crossing stones a hare moving like
one of the shadows jays warning through bare branches
the afternoon was drawing toward winter the signposts
at the crossroads even then were rusted over

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BRENDA HILLMAN

Torn Shadow

– In the minor city of black joy you lay awake.
And, you could just about
go out there, couldn't you,
torn shadow.
Part that was almost loved.

But who would have noticed you.
Would the wind with its nada nada,
or the moon with her acne scars, would she,
or the tulips, whispering too loudly
for you to join them
or the mommy darkness? Not really.

You went out to the night city,
you went suffering again. You called
to the night city, you called suffering again,
and midnight came with its twelve dancing princess type of thing,
the dark boys brought their shadows past the bed,
: the daddy the brother the drug-boy
the hunger the meaning
junkie who read magazines standing up for free
the nice scholar the not-nice scholar
the wild boy of suppose
poet one poet two poet B
and the dream pirate who loved night so well
he wore his bracelets like the moon
and stirred the afternoon into his tea, and

; you asked them why
wasn't I loved and the dark boys said, nyeh nyeh
you didn't want to be.

But the dark boys loved the won't part, didn't they.
You know the won't part:
won't work won't shit won't love
serene gifts round beaches the so-called
light of day. Most of the universe is filled with it,
it seems like. Dark matter, lamb fat,
Tuesday night television.
The won't part won't go away.

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(So you asked again why wasn't I loved,
and the dark boys said
we had a torn shadow, how could we have been.)

Nights at the marina, thick with fishermen there,
their buckets full of pliant perch,
you can fly over the city,
see the rejected shadow, the him and the not-him.
Marlboro smoke makes pewter fences between the men,
beer bottles with paper bags bunched down
around the mouth-places,
and the shadows lie faithfully flat beside their owners
in the medium neither;
what could be darker than the male shadow at night
before it is plucked up by gulls, (, all
both of them) and dropped into the famous sea –

(So you asked again
how can I love if I was not loved
and they said, you can lie down in your emptiness now
if you want to.)

At night the prison glows like the back of the Mona Lisa.
The men make sexual deals with each other.
The beautiful swagger,, (as if that's bad)
the locomotive tattooed
on the back of another (as if that's bad)
the man bends over the sink spitting,
the hurt and the extra senses clouding his blood,
they want to televise his execution,
televise his face as he slumps down,
they show the picture of the man he killed,
he says he would do it again, over and over . . .

Torn shadow,
dark boy,
darling, doomed male energy,

you spoke well when you were young,
you blended in with the night
when they told you to; you acted strong,
so why didn't they. Why
didn't they love you.

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RICK LYON

Jimmy

He'd always have a bag of bread for the ducks and swans,
which eventually made a point of paying a visit,
gangs of them, once their babies had hatched.
Feeding the ducks helped to pass the time
between shuttling people back and forth on the ferry –
boring work, but he was out on the water with the ducks and boats
and little to bother him,
and the job was hardly more tedious than managing a gas station,
which he did, weekends.
Living with his parents, mid-thirties, a boxer once,
he wasn't going anywhere, but wasn't a problem, anyway.
Then his dad died and he started talking a little crazy –
the death, drug use, maybe both –
quit the job, and was soon dodging the cops.
You'd wonder whether someone might half wish insanity on himself,
to make it real,
acting crazy and evil as if to eliminate all doubt,
because, next thing, at knife point, he'd tried to drag a girl into
the woods,
she'd broken free, and he's now found a new home for a long while.
His story's less grim than what happened last winter
when a trooper walked up to a van, beside the highway,
two minutes too late to save the woman.
But the ugly things won't prove less so.
The swans move as if nothing can harm them,
turning away, proud, and not to be touched.

JEFFREY HARRISON

The Ganges at Benares

On the stone steps leading down to the river
a gauntlet of crippled, wailing beggars,
flailing rope-veined arms like cilia
along a microörganism's gullet,
disgorges a stream of pilgrims and tourists
onto the next tier. Already the red sun

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is rising over the far shore's
ashen wasteland like the first blood glow
of a slow atomic explosion,
weakly illuminating the great wall
of crumbling temples that, on this bank, curves off
in both directions into pale and smoky light.

The ghats are coming to life. The first bathers –
women in bright saris, men in loincloths –
dunk themselves in the river's gray water,
cupping the liquid in trembling hands,
lifting it to the sun, and letting it splash down
as they mumble a three-thousand-year-old prayer.

Soon the ghats are swarming with people.
Some foam at the mouth, brushing their teeth with twigs,
squatting barbers shave their customers,
and women wallop laundry against flat stones.
It's like a holy, urban beach:
gray-bearded brahmins, naked to the waist,

oil up under big rattan umbrellas
or do yoga calisthenics,
flexing their spiritual muscles
and making their bulging bellies quiver.
Emaciated sadhus with matted hair
lean on their staffs or meditate on platforms.

Old men who have come from all over India
sit on the stone steps, waiting to die;
at the moment of death, Shiva whispers
the Mantra of the Great Crossing in their ear,
and they disappear forever from this life
of suffering, from the weary cycle of death

and rebirth. Children fly paper kites
in the smoke plumes rising from the burning ghat.
A pair of legs, intact, dangles off a pyre.
A mourner prods a blackened head
to release the soul and keep the skull
from bursting. Other bodies, wound

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in muslin, scattered with marigolds,
and roped to bamboo stretchers, wait their turn.
Stacks of wood lean against toppling stupas.
A boat with patchwork sail is piled high
with splintered wood, another with ashes
which, later, will be released into the river.

By now, after so many centuries,
the river's silt is the color of ashes,
and during the monsoon it washes up
on the opposite shore, joining
that gray desert that goes on forever,
a vast and formless void, where the world ends,

and where, with every sunrise, it begins.

EDWIN ZIMMERMAN

Dido Was Smitten

Dido was smitten by that great dolt Aeneas.
She did not know why. Perhaps
It was the bronze helmet with bristling arc
Of horsehair, or his gleaming pectorals,
Or the dark bass intoning the fall of Troy,
Or the squat broadsword dangling at his side.
She was smitten but he was not
And the gifts she gave he later gave away,
Placating some lesser god or goddess
Or dressing the corpse of a secondary hero
With robes she had woven, embroidered with silver,
Forgetting, if he ever knew, how she had looked
When they went hunting, a quiver at her back,
Her short cloak caught around her shoulders,
Her hair tied up with gold and a brooch of gold
Pinning her scarlet dress as she moved like a doe
With an arrow in her that was not yet felt.

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ASKOLD MELNYCZUK

The Current Radio

I wanted to be
absolute and unyielding
as a butcher's tears; to learn

what was tearing
apart the world,
my heart; to understand

the spree of disasters
called History, the disappeared,
blind marble,

widows, and flowering
wrists. What ever drove us
up La Veleta, las mas

alta via in todo Europa, past
sunflowers and men
dealing honey? Seeing Goya

with the eyes
of Newark and the heart
of Bayonne, blind feet

risking a jota
near the casino
by the sea where

your father's tide
swept in
its rage. Owls,

gypsies of thought,
brooded in solitude.
So I walked

into music, heard
the bitter lieder,
the current radio.

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Woman, what I wanted
was the rain
and the mountains,

the black coca
of your blood and your hair,
earth rearranged

by your eyes, the stars
finding their proper
spaces at last.

SAMUEL MENASHE

Hallelujah

Eyes open to praise
The play of light
Upon the ceiling –
While still abed raise
The roof this morning
Rejoice as you please
Your Maker who made
This day while you slept,
Who gives grace and ease,
Whose promise is kept.

"Let them sing for joy upon their beds."
Psalm 149

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Down to Earth

Sun in the skein
Of sky through trees
Unravels silk
From saplings

Sit with the stone
Wall at your back
Out of the wind
That bends the grass

Old as the Hills

for John Thornton

The lilt of a slope
Under the city
Flow of the land
With streets in tow
Where houses stand
Row upon row

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MARJORIE ROSENBERG

The Greeks Had No Word for It

With the invention of a social identity defined entirely by sexual preference, the cultural meaning of homosexual behavior has been newly constructed in the twentieth century.

For the Greek city-states of the classical period, just as for many tribal groups, homosexuality was conceived principally as a phase of training in masculinity and was thus socially prescribed. Warrior cultures required the separation of young males from females during a period in which instruction in sexual, military, and athletic practices took place. The product of this regime was, finally, a young man deemed ready to become a husband and father, as well as a defender of his community. Primarily age-related, homosexuality was rigidly structured and served a number of social purposes in societies where few females were sexually available outside of marriages based on economic considerations.

The conception of a large proportion of adult males committed to a life of exclusive homosexual relationships is a late twentieth-century phenomenon, and the question of what cultural and social purposes such a commitment may serve is one that requires further investigation.

In contrast to our present homosexual culture, focused on personal desire and sexual liberation, Greek homosexuality – unequivocally misogynistic – nonetheless addressed questions that went far beyond sexual behavior to attempt a consideration of the essence of masculinity, the needs of society and the nature of a good life.

The following essay, part of a longer work, represents an effort to view Greek homosexuality in its social context.

Ancient Greece, unhampered by the Christian sense of sin and Puritanical joylessness, is thought to have experienced in the classical period a Golden Age of Homosexuality. Yet Socrates compared the sexual pursuit of a youth by Kritias with the desire of a pig to scratch himself against a stone, reflecting the Greek view of the merely physical as less than human. In the same vein, Aristophanes ridicules women for their inability to control their sexual desires, and the myth of Tiresias, who experienced part of his life as a woman and part as a man, has him concluding that women enjoy intercourse nine times more than men – a testimony, one may infer, to their lower nature, which was seen as uncontrolled by the masculine gifts of reason and moral discrimination. Promiscuous sexuality in Greek art and drama is the province of comedy

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and is projected onto satyrs, ugly old men with huge penises.

Philosophy and artistic expression aside, the citizens of the city-state had many grounds for vilifying or ridiculing an unusual degree of enthusiasm for either homosexual or heterosexual activity. The results of such activity were too likely to be disadvantageous to the community – perhaps rape or adultery, the softening of military vigor, the temptation to acquire money dishonestly to purchase sexual favors, or the squandering of an inheritance for the same purpose, rather than its preservation as taxable income.

Interestingly, the reciprocal desire of partners belonging to the same age category is virtually unknown in Greek homosexuality or in Greek marriage, both being predicated on a considerable age difference which would act as a restraint on excessively uninhibited behavior. The younger partner was not expected to be carried away with passion for the older lover or husband, and the older partner was regarded as the inculcator of the social virtues.

Convention and strictures abounded in the private sexual relations between males of the citizen class. That of the age difference just referred to was a primary one, and the first appearance of down on the cheek of the younger partner was often the signal for the end of the affair, since this sign of adult masculinity was incompatible with the passive role of the boy. It was shocking if the pursuer was younger than the pursued, and Xenophon's *Anabasis*, portraying Menon as a man almost too bad to be believable, asserts that while too young himself to have grown a beard, he treated as his passive partner the bearded Tharypas.

The approved pattern of homosexual courtship in classical Athens was, in fact, startlingly like that portrayed for heterosexual society in nineteenth-century English literature, as K. J. Dover has noted. The sought-after youth, like the proper English female virgin, did not desire nor seek sexual intercourse. Only after a protracted display of virtue, talents, patience, and devotion on the part of the lover was the Greek youth expected to yield sexual favors. Gratitude, admiration, and a desire to learn from the older lover – not reciprocal desire – were the approved motives, and the difficulty of the chase enhanced the value of its object to the older man. Hunting was a favorite sport of the Greeks, and the very frequent use of words for pursuit, flight, and capture in the literature of homosexuality sustains the notion that the youth was the quarry of his lover, providing an excitement which was lacking in marriages based on considerations of property and family alliances.

But fear of the dishonor attaching in Athenian society to the subordination of oneself to the wishes of another permeanted sexual activity between males of the citizen class. The inferior position of all women and of

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male slaves and foreigners allowed a variety of sexual expression with them which became problematic for the Greeks between males of equal status, the group among whom most homosexual activity took place. Thus, the anal penetration of women commonly pictured in Greek vase painting has very few counterparts in pictures of homosexual intercourse, and scenes of fellatio are confined to heterosexual activity or the antics of satyrs. Women are almost invariably placed in a physically subordinate position, while the intercrural copulation of two males, which appears as the norm, shows the youth standing bolt upright, looking past his partner, who bows his head and shoulders as he inserts his penis between the boy's thighs. Obvious enjoyment of sexual activity in the pictured scenes is largely confined to women or satyrs, and women are often shown satisfying their sexual cravings artificially by means of dildos.

Greek comedy and other literary sources support the view that the youth who broke the conventions – sought or expected sensual pleasure from his homosexual lover, permitted a subordinate physical position or the penetration of a bodily orifice – detached himself from the ranks of male citizens and classified himself with women, slaves, and foreigners. Any male believed to have done whatever his senior homosexual partner wanted him to do was considered to have prostituted himself.

Yet the Greek vase paintings studied by K. J. Dover did, in their depiction of the male genitals, indirectly seem to indicate the difference in status of the partners. Beautiful youths are invariably portrayed with very small, thin penises, unrealistic in contrast to the depiction of a normal scrotum and incongruous with their broad shoulders and powerful thighs, the latter apparently a strong sexual stimulus. Dover's view is that the small penis not only represents an intended contrast between the immature and the adult male but that it is "an index of modesty and subordination, an abjuration of sexual initiative or sexual rivalry." He explains the painters' adoption of the ideal youthful penis as the standard for men, heroes and gods as a tendency to make them all appear young, but since the senior homosexual partner was usually a young adult not yet married, the convention may also be another reflection of the Greek disavowal of the purely sexual as an approved stimulus. This seems the more likely in that satyrs are routinely pictured in the vase paintings with enormous penises, and a very large, pendulous artificial penis was normal wear for the comic actors of Aristophanes's time.

Greek literature is virtually silent on the subject of female homosexuality, classical Attic literary sources referring to it only once and that in an imaginary context, when Plato, in one of his *Symposia*, has Aristophanes explaining the origin of sexual preference. The phantasy offered is that humans were originally double beings of three types – all

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male or all female or of mixed male and female character. Once divided by order of Zeus they pursued their lost half – as we all still do – a conception which shares the fatalism of the contemporary desire to set sexual preference in the concrete of biological determinism. But the Greek tale does not conceive of exclusive homosexuality, merely a lack of enthusiasm for carrying out society's requirements with the opposite sex on the part of the double male or double female.

As for the actual behavior of Athenian women, Sarah Pomeroy, who has written on women in the ancient world, takes the feminist stance that they had insufficient self-respect to engage in homosexual activity. What is more certain is that women of the citizen class were so confined to their homes, isolated from their peers and regulated in their activities that the possibility for the development of such attachments was almost nonexistent. The women of Sparta and Lesbos enjoyed educational opportunities in an all-female setting which were denied to their Athenian counterparts and were generally allowed greater freedom of movement, which has made them more suspect to male writers of a later time. Plutarch, centuries after the classical era, asserts that Spartan women of good repute were in love with girls, and the homosexuality of Sappho of Lesbos, advertised through the ages, was likewise a Hellenistic creation, never mentioned in any of the extant comedies about her produced in classical Athens: no one who speaks of Sappho's love for her own sex can be dated before the Augustan period.

Married, the mother of a daughter and mistress of a school for aristocratic young women, her unique gifts as a poet placed her in an otherwise male intellectual culture, whose poetic conventions she used. Whether her participation in this culture implied homoerotic behavior is less important than the fact that in the Greek mind intellectual work was indissolubly linked to the capacities, indeed the physical nature, of the male. In effect, later commentators accorded Sappho the sexual, as well as the intellectual, status of the male.

Greek comedy is completely mute on the subject of female homosexuality, while freely attributing lustfulness, bibulousness, and frequent masturbatory activity to women – the latter viewed as appropriate only to slaves when practiced by males, a sign of their restricted opportunities. Adopting the Freudian mode, one can imagine male anxiety as a reason for failure to deal with the subject, but hardly if it were a common, observable phenomenon, especially since comedy exists in large part to give expression to that which is politely unmentionable or anxiety-provoking. It is more likely that the merely sexual sphere to which women were confined was conceived to be incapable of encompassing the complex nature and function of Greek homosexuality.

But even more important than such negative evidence are the artic-

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ulated attitudes toward women which, at least from the sixth through the fourth century B. C., coexisted with a valued male homosexual culture among the upper classes. The Homeric epics present neither overt homosexuality nor a view of women as incompetent or inferior; and comparisons between archaic and classical Athens indicate that at least upper-class women flourished in an aristocratic society, while none fared as well under the democracy. Pomeroy suggests that the degree of democratic equality imposed was intolerable to male citizens, who proceeded to separate themselves as a group, emphasizing their superiority to women, as well as to slaves and foreigners.

In Athens, women lacked status even as mothers. The female contribution to the fetus not being understood, they were thought to provide only a fertile field in which the male sowed the seed. In Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, presented in 458 B. C., Apollo says:

> She who is called the mother is not her offspring's
> Parent, but nurse to the newly born embryo.
> The male – who mounts – begets. The female, a stranger,
> Guards a stranger's child if no god bring it harm.

Since children were produced to perpetuate the father's house, they were the property of the father and remained with his family in the case of his death. In fact, only men and male children belonged to the family in any permanent sense. Women were easily transferred from their father's families to those of successive husbands in the case of widowhood, and men were readily, with a self-created reason, suspicious of the loyalty of women to the families in which they found themselves. Married off at the age of fourteen or fifteen to men of thirty, women in classical Athens had a shorter life expectancy by five to ten years than their warrior husbands. Poor nourishment for women, enforced lack of exercise in the rigid seclusion of their lives, and early childbearing was apparently the more dangerous regimen.

Since a baby was not a member of a family until the father made a ceremonial declaration to that effect, exposure of the newborn often served in the place of abortion. Except in Sparta, where Plutarch asserts that all girls were reared to become the mothers of warriors, there is evidence that female infants were more frequently disposed of than male. Responsible fathers did not raise girls unless they foresaw a proper marriage for them at maturity, which implied also the ability to provide an appropriate dowry; but even rich fathers abandoned female babies. A study of three-hundred forty-six propertied and influential families listed in Johannes Kirchner's classical work, *Prosopographica Attica*, shows the ra-

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tio of boys to girls as nearly five to one. Evidence from ancient literary sources, which admittedly might have taken notice principally of the children who mattered most – the boys – gives the impression of a preponderance of male children among well-known Athenians, and the archaic period shows a male-female population ratio of almost two to one in the Agora burial plot. Again, this could be explained by speculating that more men were honored by prestigious burials than women. But the population pressure which caused the Athenians to colonize so energetically, finding foreign wives where they took root, argues for the disposal of greater numbers of unvalued female infants at home. At the same time, the high ratio of males coincided with the prevalence of a male homosexual culture.

The relative scarcity of female citizens was combined with a seclusion which kept them in the women's quarters of their homes, seldom seen even by male relatives, and chaperoned on their rare outings to religious ceremonies or other restricted destinations. Young upper-class males were thus effectively prevented from consorting with girls of their own class prior to marriage. They were left with the alternatives of boys, prostitutes, and slaves for the twelve or more years of maturity prior to marriage. For some eight generations it became quite usual at Athens for young males to choose boys as love objects and also as sexual partners. Boys, after all, were much more likely to have a disinterested affection for a young man than were slaves or paid partners. Marriage existed for the production of an heir and for economic purposes. Moreover, a family-arranged alliance with a totally uneducated girl, whose life had been spent among equally ignorant female relatives and slaves, was not likely to be conducive to enjoyable companionship and, in fact, husband and wife seldom met but in bed.

An often-quoted fourth-century lawyer (Pseudo-Demosthenes, in *Against Neasera*) declared in open court, speaking as a matter of course, the nature of male control over women:

> We resort to courtesans for our pleasures, keep concubines to look after our daily needs, and marry wives to give us legitimate children and be faithful guardians of our domestic hearths.

Michel Foucault cautions against regarding this as evidence of a pervasive and rigid division of female roles but asserts that the few Greek texts which enjoin male monogamy do so as an exhortation to self-mastery, which was seen as a further justification for the husband's rule over his wife, not as an approach to equality. Even so, homosexuality was generally confined to the years before marriage and treated as an initiation

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into masculinity, in contrast to other extramarital indulgences.

It must be noted, however, that homosexuality at Sparta, where it is thought to have been considerably more prevalent than at Athens, rested on a very different social system, and perhaps an even more limited and unsympathetic association between men and women. The highest priority of the state was the production of warriors, since Sparta was constantly at war. There, the biological role of the mother was seen as at least as important as that of the father, resulting in a physical regime for girls which insured that they were as well-nourished as boys, participated like them in gymnastics on a regular basis, and were freed from housework and the fabrication of clothing, which were left to women of inferior classes. They married later than Athenian girls, at eighteen, to young men of the same age, instituting a highly ritualized and attenuated marital relationship in which the husband continued to live with his army group until the age of thirty and visited his wife only by stealth. The marriage customs of the Spartans can never fail to titillate with their eccentricity, but they possessed both practical and psychological utility for a military society.

As Plutarch recounted in his life of Lycurgus:

> Marriage at Sparta was a process of abduction. . . . The bride, once carried off, was handed over to a special female attendant, who cut her hair short, dressed her up in a man's tunic and shoes and laid her on a straw mattress where she was left alone in the dark. The bridegroom dined in the usual way with his friends. Then he visited the bride, removed her belt, and carried her to a bed. After a short time with her, he rejoined his companions in the dormitory for men of his own age. He continued always to act in this way, spending both day and night in male company and going only in secret, with every precaution, to visit his wife. . . . These habits were kept up for such a long time that sometimes a husband had children without ever having seen his wife by daylight.

In effect, Spartan marriage was a kind of trial marriage, as Pomeroy has noted, the purpose being to determine whether the woman was capable of conceiving. Since the union was carried on in almost complete secrecy, it could be nullified without public dishonor if the bride did not become pregnant. But the secrecy and the failure of men to make a home away from their barracks were obviously more important as a defense against any turning away from military discipline and associations.

However, these marriages, arranged almost entirely for procreation, rarely resulted in a large family. The poverty of Sparta, which was only a collection of villages – not a large city like Athens – did not encourage parents to produce many children, and, in fact, the population began to

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dwindle in the fifth century B.C. and fell catastrophically in the fourth. Perhaps it was not only constant warfare and economic conditions which were responsible; procreation as a duty to the state may have failed a a stimulus.

Sparta and Crete alone, among the Greek city-states, constructed societies in which familial and individual relationships were effectively subordinated to military organization. It was both predictable and useful in such societies that the valued warriors would most value each other, and thus a strong homosexual culture developed. But whether Greek homosexuality originated in the military organization of Dorian states, as many scholars assert, is unprovable.

What can be observed is the function of male homosexuality in the fragmented Greek world where each city-state was constantly confronted with the problem of survival against aggressive neighbors. Bound together through political and military associations on which their lives and the continued existence of their states depended, male citizens shared an intensity of experience and a common purpose. Family life was everywhere secondary, and the devaluation of women, which began with their lack of physical strength and endurance, was augmented by the opposition between their family-centered lives and the public concerns of their husbands. Greek tragedy often dramatized this conflict, as in Sophocles's *Antigone*, where the tyrant, Creon, forbids the burial of the heroine's brother because of his treachery to the state. But Antigone dares to flout his commands because of her sense of family obligation and is, in turn, entombed alive by Creon. Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, in part a retaliation for his sacrifice of their daughter, Iphegenia, in the cause of the Trojan War, is a more complicated embodiment of this opposition of values.

But although the conflict was resolved neither in life nor in drama, compensatory satisfactions occurred in the intimacy of male associations. Having placed the highest value on what were thought to be exclusively male activities and attributes, it is unsurprising that the Greeks came to value love between males and then to use this love to further their social purposes. Always, however, the emphasis was on love, with a great elaboration of its nonphysical expression. Thus, the older lover – most often himself a young adult – approached the beautiful boy he admired as a teacher, an initiator into masculine activities. The boy might have been selected for his beauty, but the Greeks chose to believe that beauty was an indication of virtue and then worked to make this true. Lovers claimed that they participated actively in the moral and intellectual development of the boys who permitted their attentions.

Xenophon reports on this phenomenon with some skepticism in the

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Constitution of Sparta:

> When a virtuous Lacadaemonian took pains to make a true friend of a boy whose talents he admired and to take him for a companion, Lycurgus would praise the man and regard the relationship as the finest form of education. But the Spartan lawgiver thoroughly disapproved of all desire obviously concerned with the lad's person. As a result of this view, lovers at Sparta were as little addicted to sensual pleasures in the company of their loved ones as parents are in relations with their children or brothers with brothers.

But this is too much for Xenophon, who adds:

> Some people refuse all the same to believe such a thing. I am not surprised.

Many generations later, Plutarch responds to the excessive pretensions of Greek homosexuality with a similar skepticism:

> Homosexuals who claim that sensuality plays no part in their affairs do so because they are ashamed of themselves and fear punishment. They have to have some excuse for approaching good-looking boys, so they make a show of friendship and virtue. They cover themselves with dust in the arena, take cold baths, and frown heavily. They assume the outward airs of a learned philosopher. . . .

Yet the vision of the philosophers of the classical age of an affair of minds rather than bodies assured the place of mind and spirit in male attachments, which in a large number of cases also had a sexual element. But it must be remembered that the Greeks were concerned primarily with the nature of love, not the sex of one's partner. Thus, the criticism of excessive sensuality between homosexual lovers reflected a moral view that applied equally to relations with women and to what Foucault has called "the use of pleasure." Moderation and self-mastery were always the central issues, and to have loose morals was to be incapable of resisting sexual pleasure with either women or boys.

Although the Greeks themselves frequently questioned, criticized, and satirized the sexual aspects of male homosexuality, they celebrated the effectiveness of love between males in producing the manly virtues. Plato makes Phaedo say in the *Symposium*:

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> A handful of lovers and loved ones, fighting shoulder to shoulder, could rout a whole army. For a lover to be seen by his beloved forsaking the ranks or throwing away his weapons would unquestionably be less bearable than to do so in the presence of a crowd. He would a thousand times rather die than be so humiliated. As for abandoning his loved one on the field or refusing to rescue him when in peril, the worst of cowards would be inspired by the god of love on such occasions to prove himself the equal of any man naturally brave. For the gallantry which, as Homer says, a deity "breathes into the hearts of heroes" is truly a gift of Love to lovers, one which they owe to him alone.

This passage is credited with supplying the name for the famous "sacred band" of Thebes, a military unit composed of pairs of lovers, which was for a long time considered invincible in battle, until slain to man, all with pike wounds in front, in the victory of Philip of Macedon at Chaeronea. Many such stories of the courage of male lovers were told by the Greeks to each other for inspirational effect, but perhaps the most famous – that of Harmodius and Aristogeiton of Athens – indicates the self-delusion as well as the intent of the ideal.

Thucydides recounts it "to show that the Athenians are not more accurate than the rest of the world in their accounts of their own tyrants and the facts of their own history." The tale goes that Harmodius, a youth of striking beauty, beloved by Aristogeiton, was solicited for his favors by Hipparchus, the brother of the tyrant, Hippias. The unreciprocated advances enraged Aristogeiton and produced a calculated insult to the sister of Harmodius, who was forbidden to appear in the Panathenaic procession after having been invited to do so. A desire for revenge for this insult on the part of the youth united with jealousy and rage on the part of the lover, and they laid a plot to overthrow the tyranny, which Thucydides describes as "not grievous to the multitude, or in any way odious in practice," adding that, "these tyrants cultivated wisdom and virtue as much as any." Confusion at the time of the public festival during which the assassination was to take place resulted in the murder by the lovers of Hipparchus, the man against whom their revenge was indirectly aimed, but it left the tyrant in power. After this, the tyranny pressed harder on the Athenians, and Hippias, now grown more fearful, put to death many of the citizens. Yet because of these events, homosexuality acquired fresh glory at Athens, being almost equated with love of liberty and hatred of tyranny, and the lovers were extolled by poets, painters, and sculptors – all this in spite of the personal cause of their action, the miscarriage of the efforts, and the repression which they produced. This extreme and willful misreading, so widely celebrated, of the effects of homosexual love would

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seem to cast doubt on the general accuracy of Greek claims for the value of male attachments.

Erroneous as was the contemporary evaluation of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, it underlines the purposes which homosexuality was meant to serve in perpetuating a highly individualistic, competitive, warrior society. Relieving to some extent the isolation from family life and providing an intellectual and military brotherhood, it implicitly incorporated aggressiveness and the need for domination to an extent that could only exacerbate these causes of the fragmentation and eventual deterioration of the Greek states.

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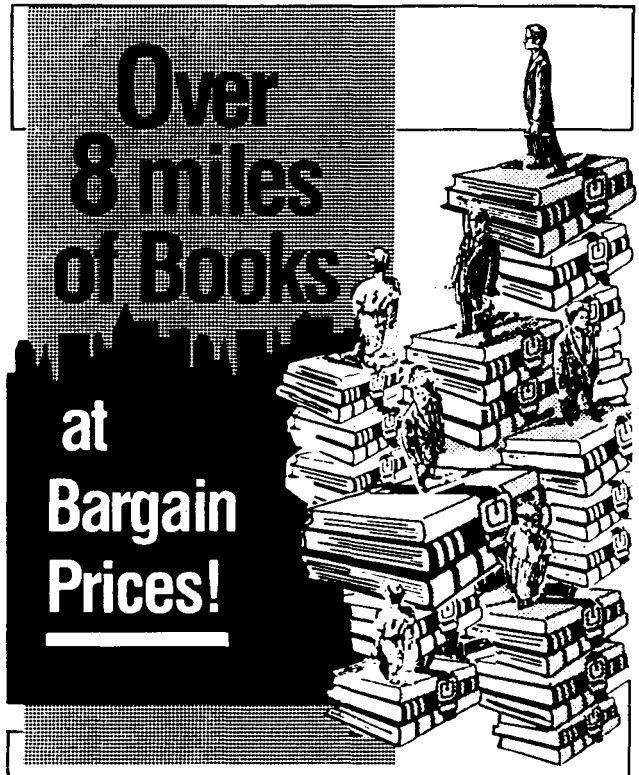

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JOSEPH BRODSKY

Democracy!

(continued from page 194)

Different bank notes.

Means five grand per nose.

What do you mean, per nose? For Gustav, too?

Gustav, too.

But he didn't want to share it, Mr. President. That is, Basil Modestovich, why him? He was resisting.

He is as much a member of the cabinet, Petrovich, as you, Cecilia, and I.

Yeah, he is simply in the minority.

Demagoguery! Your brains have gone soft because of democracy, isn't it? Our share goes up by five hundred grand. This, even if divided by three . . .

Nobody can divide five hundred by three – moreover evenly. Even Gustav can't, not to mention you.

And I won't. [*Explodes.*] Neither by four, nor by three, nor by half. All of you go to hell! Soft bourgeois! Rot! All is mine! I grabbed it and it's mine! Bye, bye. See you in Paris. [*Petrovich rushes to the exit. The bear emerges with a handgun in his paw.*]

[*Pause.*]

Don't be a fool, Petrovich. Sit down and finish your dumplings, or else they'll get cold.

[*Petrovich, completely devastated, shuffles back to the table, throws the briefcase on it, and sits down.*]

That Bandylegs works for you now, in other words.

I give you my word of honor, Petrovich, that I am as surprised as you are.

Simply a highly-trained bear, Basil Modestovich. The vestiges of folklore. Gypsies in days of yore were performing with things like that at country fairs.

But – inanimate.

The only consolation. Though we should check that out.

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Multipurpose robot, presumably. Nonstop transmission plus the defense of the client's interest. The logical conclusion of the hidden camera principle.

As I said, they keep an eye . . .

But it's only on the economy, Petrovich.

Cecilia, pass Gustav some water.

Danke. I'm better already.

Then go ahead and finish off the shrimp.

With beer, Gustav. There is some beer left.

You too, Petrovich. Won't hurt to cool you off.

But I already have, Basil Modestovich.

By the way, Petrovich. What language were you intending to use in Paris?

Well, this one. There are lots of our emigrés. Half of them still working for me.

And where would you put the money?

Well, in the bank, I guess.

Which one?

Ach, who cares? Why torture a man in vain, Basil Modestovich?

But do you have any idea what kind of taxes they have? Do you understand that with these taxes they would rob you in no time – especially without citizenship – worse than you just tried to do to us?

Why torment a man?

Because with money it is better to invest little by little in a variety of things than to keep it all in the bank, Petrovich. It's about time for you to know this, since pension is not far off. Best to buy some land, or a house. Real estate, in a word. And it's better to do it from here than on the spot, for the same tax reasons.

Oh, Basil Modestovich. What are you doing to me?

Ah, Petrovich. All of us are temporary here, you and Gustav and Cecilia and I. And it's not because of democracy with its elections – this sort of thing we can sort out. It's simply that the age is not the same. By the year 2000 we won't be around and the soda monopoly – even if it arrives, we won't see it. In the worst case, we'll get ousted, like you-know-who in 1917. In the best, they'll issue a stamp, since we introduced democracy. So one shouldn't grab everything oneself. One should think about the others also. Not to mention that on the whole it's easier to divide everything by four somehow than by three.

Basil Modestovich, what a dear man you are . . . Petrovich, don't get soppy.

Yes, Petrovich, get some beer.

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[*Enter Matilda, in leopard-spotted underwear, pushing before her a little cart on which stands a big cardboard box, on top of which there is a tray with desserts. The bear zeroes in on Matilda.*]

Dessert, ladies and gentlemen. And this is for you, Mr. President, from London. And also, Mr. President, there is a big demonstration in town. Heading toward the palace. *Bon appétit*, messieurs, dames.

Hermés?

Givenchy. [*Exits.*]

As the poet said, what is a monster without a demonstration?

Nowadays they've got to loiter about after hours as well.

It can't be anything serious. Especially since the foreign correspondents dine in the evening.

Unlike the locals.

Perhaps it's over prices.

Unlikely. Who can be surprised these days by prices?

Maybe the sewers burst again.

Yeah, last night the temperature dropped rather sharply.

No, more likely it's my new decree against beggars.

Maybe one should call the police?

Indeed, Petrovich. Why don't you give your boys a buzz and find out what it's all about.

Okay, but don't finish the chocolate torte without me.

[*Petrovich walks to the head of state's desk, lifts up the phone and dials a number. Meanwhile the bear turns toward the window and stares out.*]

Gustav, divide the cake by four.

With pleasure.

Not like the briefcase, is it?

Not with the same knife.

Ha ha ha.

I can't, Mr. President. National property.

Gustav, you are a dear! National!

There is your nation; pushing toward the palace. Presumably to get us.

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Perhaps it's he himself who instigated this . . .

Can't be ruled out . . .

How could you possibly think that way, Basil Modestovich!!!

What's up, Petrovich?

The police station is occupied.

What? They've already occupied the police?

No, just the telephone.

Telephone and telegraph?!

Cool off, Cecilia. The line's simply busy. Short tones.

Ah.

Take some cake, then. It's marvelous. Gustav cut you a piece.

I should try to get through first.

Oh, don't you worry. Teddy's keeping an eye on it anyway.

Cake is of course cake. But how about this? [*Nods toward briefcase.*]

Especially since they are pushing for the palace.

Gustav says no way. National property.

Whaaaat? Up to your old tricks again, you bitch.

But it's two million!

And where is the rest?

Ten percent of the loan, Mr. President, is in hard cash. To accelerate the purchase of glass from Sweden.

Which glass?

What Sweden?

He is out of his mind!

The glass for the soda factory. Bottles, in your language.

But we'd rather recycle our own!

Right. As it is, my butler saw three kids through college with my bottles. Higher education.

And I, for one, I collect. Nice labels. Martell . . .

Indeed, Gustav. We'll kick up a campaign for collecting. On a national scale.

If this country abounds in anything, it's bottles.

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Sweden is no match . . .

But they are not matching bottles!

Guuustav, stop being a fool.

Yes, they are approaching the palace.

There is no time.

Give me the briefcase.

Cecilia, block the bear.

But he's looking the other way anyhow.

Moreover.

I cannot! I protest!

Take five hundred grand and shut up.

And this is for me.

This is for me.

This, Basil Modestovich, is yours.

Thank you.

[*Pause.*]

This is a violation . . .

What a bore.

I was right. We shouldn't give him a share.

Regardless of his views, Petrovich, he is not a young boy after all.

Oh, yeah. Christian sentiments . . .

No, it's a matter of principle.

Yeah, after all: Democracy.

We'll never join the Common Market this way.

Oh, stop whining.

They are pushing for the palace.

Indeed, Petrovich, what's the matter there? Give them a buzz.

Right. [*Petrovich goes to the telephone and dials the number. Meanwhile the bear turns away from the window.*] Ah? What? How many thousand? Twenty or thirty? Youngsters you say? In leather? What? Excited? High? Banners and slogans? Uh-huh. No, I don't understand, repeat. No, I don't get it. Repeat letter by letter.

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What do you mean "foreign"? You mean "gow chowme"? Spell it out. "Chye," "ve," "ee," "em," "ye," "te," "eh," "el"? Uh-huh. I took it down. No, I don't get it. Abracadabra. "Hyevy. Mi. Toll"? Is that what it is? Cecilia? "Hyevymitoll"? Sounds like medicine. What kind of language is it anyway?

It's clearly not German.

And not in Cyrillic either.

Then there is nothing to worry about. . . .

English, isn't it?

Matilda! [*Bear perks up. Enter Matilda. Wearing only her leopard-spotted stockings.*]

Well, look, Matilda, what Petrovich took down here.

The demonstrators' demands.

More exactly, a slogan.

Presumably "down with" – but in what language?

Just a minute, just a minute.

Quick.

Yes, they are approaching the palace.

Hyevy Mitoll. Ahhh. This is in English. Heavy Metal.

What does it mean?

Heavy Metal means Heavy Metal. It's rock music. [*Matilda waves her hips accordingly.*]

Valentino?

Valentino. [*Matilda exits.*]

Ah, there is a concert tonight in the stadium.

Right. Cultural exchange.

And you, Cecilia, were nervous.

But it's a crowd. . . .

A crowd, as I've told you Cecilia, always assumes a form. Either of a street or of a square or of a stadium. That's what they are for. To constitute a choice.

I thought a square.

When a square it's a demonstration.

Or a meeting.

Or a revolution.

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Revolution is when they burst into the palace.

They burst into the palace if there is no stadium.

Whereas we've got one.

Right. Right there beside the palatial grounds. Very handy.

It's not 1917 for you.

Not to mention that history is over.

If anything, we made some progress in city planning.

Yeah, nothing to be ashamed of.

Perhaps, then, we should return the money.

Guuuustav.

But aren't they pushing for the stadium?

So what?

To listen to Heavy Metal.

And?

That is, they won't burst into the palace.

Continue your thought.

It means they don't . . .

It means, Gustav, that they don't care about soda water. Nor about the loan. Nor its ten percent.

Whereas we do.

About its ten percent, in any case.

Yeah, we're not pushing for the stadium.

Or for the barricades. Some go for the barricades, some to the bar.

Uh-huh.

Not even Cecilia, though she's the Minister of Culture.

No spring chicken, Gustav.

Not to mention the music.

Not even the jazz.

Yeah, it ain't Armstrong.

Neither Brubeck nor Dizzy Gillespie.

Not even Oscar Peterson . . .

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Why should we throw all that money at them?

But – national property . . .

But it's just a mob.

They only understand boom-boom.

Decibels.

Give them Heavy Metal.

Whereas these are bank notes.

Savages!

Not to mention, ready to overthrow . . .

We'll never enter the Common Market this way.

Oh, don't be a bore . . .

And what's the good of it anyway?

And in a certain sense we'll join.

By giving them back what's theirs.

Yeah, by acquiring their real estate.

Well, some people already did.

Gustav, how dare you!

And who has the house in Biarritz and the farm in Provence?

Slander!

Slander! Paper clippings. [*Waves a bunch.*]

Yellow journalism!

Yes. Used to be red but now turned yellow.

Sure. Time passes.

Figaro and *Le Monde*?

Ah, even if *The New York Times*.

Gentlemen Ministers. You, Gustav, especially.

And who gobbles oysters and Chinese morsels? Chasing it down with Chateaux Lafite or burgundy?

This is how, Gustav, the proletariat eat in the West.

In this sense, indeed, joined.

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The French, to say the least.

But this is corruption! Robbery! Theft of the national property. [*Menacingly.*] The nation *may not like it*. The West neither.

What's that Teutonic gnat hinting at? Basil Modestovich! He should be grabbed! [*Produces handcuffs.*]

Gentlemen Ministers. Cool it. You, Petrovich, especially. Nobody should be grabbed. Otherwise: the cabinet crises. Next time, Gustav, we'll order sausages and beer from Dortmund. Is that all right? Worse comes to worst we'll buy a Mercedes. Though the roads are of course so-so. Gustav, Gentlemen Ministers, has differences with us of mainly gastronomical denomination. Plus – natural for his origins – francophobia. It turns his stomach to see marks turning into francs. Like garlic. Not to mention into dollars. The Protestant core. Can be traced back to Luther. Stingy and prefers the bland.

That's why he's Financial Affairs.

Simply represents the Bundesbank.

But says "national interests."

Same thing, these days.

Therefore, Gustav, you should buy your little house not in Provence, but, say, in Bavaria. Not a big one, though, two stories, say, but with an orchard and all. Hydrangeas and rosebuds: in the summer honeybees buzz, the Alps loom blue in the distance . . .

White.

Well, have it your way: white. You may even call it Bethesgaden . . .

Better, though, in Thüringen . . .

Maybe you're right. The climate is more temperate and the landscape softer. 'Cause you know how it is at our age uphill . . .

But over there everybody has a Mercedes!

That's of course true. But frankly I personally would buy in Schleswig-Holstein. First of all, the sea; then, the architecture is Hanseatic. The theaters in Hamburg are also quite good, not to mention the harbor. Streets also, for exercise, are lengthy . . .

And in the morning one gets Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau on the radio . . .

Yeah, but Hamburg is quite pricey. In that case it's better in Lübeck. Besides, Thomas Mann used to live there.

Yeah, that's where he wrote *Buddenbrooks*.

Good, Cecilia.

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Though I prefer *Dr. Faustus*.

And I, you know, *Magic Mountain*.

Well, I still prefer *Buddenbrooks*. *Joseph and His Brothers*, too . . .

N-yes. *Buddenbrooks* . . .

N-yes . . .

See what I mean . . .

Ech . . .

Well, someday they depose us, say, or vote us out and we'll scatter all over the world. We'll be writing letters to each other . . . Wouldn't it be nice to get a nice little note from Gustav in Lübeck? Ah, Cecilia? Or from Thüringen?

Ah, but of course. Like in the old days. I mean, the nineteenth century. Before all this.

Wouldn't it, Petrovich?

Sure thing. Even from Bavaria.

No. I'd rather write from Lübeck . . . [*Pause.*] But if they won't depose us . . . if, to put it rudely, they reelect us. . . . After all, we introduced democracy. Petrovich, for example, let some people out from under the lock. And Cecilia, too, has permitted Heavy Metal.

And in a certain sense, we've joined the Market.

After all, somebody should say "A" . . .

Yes, and what's bothering you, Gustav?

That they might send in an auditor. That they'll come to check. Not to mention that they might introduce the troops . . .

But what for, Gustav? To drive a nation into debt is a far more secure form of occupation than invasion.

Yeah, they are not like Slavs.

Not backward.

Advanced technology.

Moreover, history has ended.

Got tired of repeating itself and ended.

And, as for the auditor, we'll introduce him to Matilda.

Right. A couple of tickets in the box office for *Swan Lake*.

Water resources, after all.

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Yeah, by way of familiarizing him.

Matilda will familiarize him, eh? . . .

No way. If anyone takes him to *Swan Lake*, it's going to be me.

Well, if you insist.

Minister of Culture, after all.

That will be Cecilia's swan song.

Ha ha ha. [*Pause.*]

Besides, if reelected, then no Lübeck.

Neither Biarritz nor Provence.

They might reelect.

Yeah, come to think of it, this job came with tenure.

Nomenklatur, after all . . .

N-yes. No Paris, either.

Well, for this eventuality, gentlemen ministers, we've got a solution. [*Taps cardboard box.*] And, by the same token, the nation has one too.

What do you have in mind, Basil Modestovich?

This.

What, this?

What's in the box.

And what's that?

It contains . . .

Wait a minute, wait a minute, Basil Modestovich. Don't say it. I know. I'll tell you in a second. It contains . . .

A watermelon!

Telescope!

A VCR!

Barking up the wrong tree, lady and gentlemen. Some nerve center! It contains the future of the country as a whole, and us in particular. In plain words, a computer.

In what sense, us?

You mean to work on it, is it?

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Punching keyboards?

For that we've got Matilda.

Yeah, I'm no Horowitz.

And I've got arthritis. The joints creak, Mr. President. Want to hear them?

My joints creak, too. [*Thirty-second pause: they all creak their joints.*] But there's no need to work on it. It works by itself.

How so?

From the outlet. Plug it into the outlet and then it's on its own. Because it's been programmed.

By whom?

How do you mean, brainwashed?

What for?

I can't recall. Either at Harvard of Oxford. They've got there the whole "Small Nation Series" called "soaftvare." It includes programs in economics, political structure, defense, ecology, minorities, and so forth. It's kind of plastic disks. Records, in our language. You put that sort of record on and it plays. Yourself you sit at home, or, say, in Lübeck, and enjoy.

But how?

At 33 or 78?

Oh, the radio. Or, if you want to, turn on your TV set. That Bandylegs is loitering about here round the clock . . .

But what if the electricity fails?

Then it switches to batteries. Automatically.

And then?

And then and then and then! Record plays, and nation prospers.

But, Basil Modestovich, what about culture?

Culture also has a record. *Swan Lake*, for instance, is every Tuesday. Maybe even more often. On the whole it's true to life . . .

You mean, realism?

Yes, realism, naturalism, and even a little bit of impressionism.

But not cubism?

Not cubism. Though sometimes a little bit of tachisme.

On the whole, abstractionism?

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Yeah, futurism.

A miracle.

Wherever did you find it, Basil Modestovich?

An ad in the paper. I got it by mail order, actually.

But where is the guarantee, Mr. President, that the thing will suit us?

Oh, but I selected "Small Countries," Gustav. I didn't get "Great Powers," you see. They've got that there as well. And "Third World," too. Even "Primitive Society." All sorts of Pygmies and Papuans. "Nomads" is also offered. Whereas I picked "Small Countries."

That is?

That is! That is! That is, with approximately our size of population, with approximately our geographic position: I specified no mountains, or, worse than that, desert. Geography, you know, Gustav, it determines everything. For there is no nation without geography.

Though the other way around is possible.

Yeah, a desert, for example. Or Kunlun. Or the Atlantic.

A desert can be vertical as well as horizontal.

Well, we'd have none of that.

On the other hand, we've got history.

Yeah, there is no population without history.

And no history without it, either.

Oh, come off it. What about Roman?

And Greek? And the Middle Ages?

Not to mention the Renaissance. Not to mention the Enlightenment.

But nobody's got history like ours!

Even though it's over.

Especially so.

Yeah, nobody's got history like ours, nobody.

But then, the record doesn't start in the nineteenth century either. Nor in 1917. Nor in 1945. Otherwise the nation would be dancing Charleston and Boogie-Woogie.

And foxtrot and tango and matchish and cakewalk and twist-and-shake and . . .

That would be anachronism, Cecilia. Even if it were lambada.

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So when does it start?

Whenever you plug it in and turn it on. Say they reelect us tomorrow: we'll turn it on tomorrow. Or in a year, or in two.

And what happens then?

Oh, nothing special, Petrovich. Well, first I guess our prices get equated to the Market's. For instance, they've got sausage at two dollars a pound, and we will, too. They've got trousers for thirty bucks a pair, and so will we . . .

Marks, Mr. President.

Yes, Gustav, I am sorry. Marks.

Or écus.

Even if yen.

But equated how? Artificially?

Automatically, Petrovich.

Automatically.

And if we don't have it?

Don't have what?

The dough. Those dollars, or marks, or écus.

Then either computer takes out a loan or the mint prints them. Automatically as well.

Wait a minute. How much?

Oh, that will calculate by itself. Based on the size of the population and its needs. Well, how much sausage does an average man consume in a year? Or beer? Or how often does he need pants or go to the movies? All that, this box figures out and then either takes a loan or prints bank notes.

And after?

After shmafter! Afterwards the man goes to work. Why does man on the whole go to work? To get paid. So they are telling him there what to do to get paid.

And how the hell do they know?

Well, computer tells them. Automatically.

And how does it know?

The Common Market tells it.

And how does Common Market know?

Once upon a time a priest got a dog from a camel! The story about the little

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white bull . . . What does it matter, Petrovich, how the Common Market knows if computer knows? What's more important, cause or effect?

Effect of course.

Right, Petrovich. And hence computer knows. What to produce, in what volume, the raw materials, where to sell.

It sings? Spills the beans in other words, blows the whistle.

Well, if you insist. The main thing is not to bust your brain, whether it's bacon or soda or heavy industry. Therefore it decides: what? when? where? Automatically. Sets the terms.

Sentences, you mean.

If you insist. Main thing, automatically. And one doesn't have to bust one's brain. Neither we nor the population.

One does time?

Well, if you wish. Though terms vary.

Sure, people are also not all alike.

Yeah, even ours.

Finicky. Aspirations all the time are changing.

Uh-huh. Now give them this, now that.

All the time they are coming up with all sorts of demands.

Well, this has all been programmed. It's all taken into account, with a margin of error of course.

Yet the population itself also varies.

Uh-huh. The growth, say, the mortality, immigration.

It's all taken into account, Gustav. Mortality especially. There is nothing easier to take into account than mortality.

Yeah, even we managed to calculate it, in our time.

A regulator of living standards, come to think of it.

In some places, simply a guarantee of their rising.

Or of stabilization. Ethiopia, for instance.

Or Bangladesh.

No, there it's rising.

Macabre.

And if some guy decides not to go to work?

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Yeah, if he refuses.

Decides that the pay is small and won't go?

Or that the Golden Age has arrived.

No, seriously. If a trade union calls a strike?

Democracy, after all.

How do I know, Gentlemen Ministers? I didn't make the record. Well, either the police will be called in, or the bosses will be cut into the deal. True to life, after all.

N-yes. Technology.

Main thing, automatically.

But, then, options are limited , too.

Take for instance the birthrate.

Not to mention mortality.

On the whole, the needs.

Both the needs and the ability.

Pity they never thought of computer before.

Why, they did. The state, for instance. Essentially it's just a version of one, isn't it. Only a cumbersome one. You can't plug it in and go to Lübeck . . . The government, to say the least. Political systems of all sorts. Not to mention parties.

And democracy?

And democracy, too. Simply takes more space.

And no automatics. Nonstop individualism. Everything by hand.

There, there. Not really everything. Taxes, for instance, are automatic.

But that's taxes.

And elections. Also automatic.

Automatic, no. Periodic.

You mean rhythmic?

Rhythmic and statistic.

Practically arithmetically.

N-yes. And yet if they overthrow . . . all the same . . . if the masses . . .

In the first place, there is a stadium for that . . .

Well, not the masses, then. If the army rebels . . .

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And why would it?

Especially with three hot meals a day.

Unlike some.

The bastards should be grateful for all I know.

Indeed.

But still. Still, if there is a plot, a putsch, a palace coup. And as a result, they overthrow us . . .

Ah, Gustav, Gustav. "Overthrow" applies only to an individual. Worse comes to worst the ruling clique, the tsar, the tyrant, the politburo, the junta, you name it. The whole charm of computer, Gustav, lies in that it's not a person but a machine. You can't put it up against the wall – well, in a manner of speaking – nor can you hang it from a lamppost, which is literally . . . You can't even spit in its face. If it's an evil, it's an inanimate one. As well as if it's a good. And as for inanimate evil, it's easier to tolerate, Gustav. Who knows that better than us? [*Automatically glances at the bear, but realizes his mistake.*]

Are you trying to say, Basil Modestovich, that it will last for seventy – [*Starts to count on fingers*] – for seventy-four more years?

Well, this, Cecilia, is the minimum. One thing I can tell you for sure, one can't overthrow it, for all one's ardor.

That is, it's like a new *nomenklatur.*

Sort of.

And ourselves, then, are kind of old hat.

Approximately.

But then it can be destroyed.

Theoretically.

Whereas we can't be.

Practically. And theoretically we are strong, too.

And after all, who would want to destroy it, Petrovich?

Oh, don't you worry. To begin with, it leaves the entire government unemployed. The whole state apparatus. They can't all go to Lübeck, can they? You first will be up in arms . . . So there's your who.

The new Luddites.

Maybe then we should booby-trap it, Basil Modestovich? Eh?

That won't stop the Luddites.

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But if it's not just a mine, but a nuclear device?

I thought about that, Petrovich. But that means violating the Geneva Convention of nonproliferation.

But what kind of proliferation is that?! The brother Slavs left so much of it in our swamps.

Ha! There is something to this! After all, it could perhaps be a solution. In any case an argument. The others don't have it.

That's why they don't bother about computers.

Yeah, afraid to violate.

The superpowers especially.

Sure thing. Gigantic state apparatus there.

With them, no mine will do.

They'll smash poor computer to pieces instantly.

Unemployment is an awful thing.

Luddites.

Yeah, in advance. Even before the introduction of new technology . . .

And that's why, I guess, they came up with the Geneva Convention in the first place.

To make it easier to destroy the poor thing.

Though it's guilty of nothing.

[*Pause.*]

After all, destruction may not be necessary . . .

One can simply not switch it on.

[*Pause.*]

Luddites is the word.

[*Pause.*]

Let's booby-trap it, Basil Modestovich, eh?

I'm afraid there is no other solution. Gentlemen Ministers, who is for? [*Petrovich and Cecilia raise their hands.*]

Is there indeed no other solution?

Gustav, memento Lübeck.

[*Gustav raises his hand.*]

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Matildaaaa! And you, Gustav, distract the bear.

If you can, of course.

Petrooovich!

[*Cecilia gets up and approaches the bear. A pantomime of seduction follows. With a sprightly step, moving with animal grace, Matilda enters stark naked but wearing a leopard tail.*]

Mr. President, you called for me?

Yes, to dictate a memo. Ready?

Yes, I am.

Okay, take it down: To the Minister of the Armed Forces: TOP SECRET. I hereby order you to deliver to the presidential palace an A-bomb with yield up to twenty megatons. A portable model is preferable. The period of executing order: twenty-four hours. On behalf of the State Council, The President. Got that?

Uh-huh.

Maybe it would be better to use a neutron one, Basil Modestovich?

Perhaps you're right, Petrovich. Matilda.

Yes, sir.

Delete "A," insert "neutron."

Done.

And why is it, Basil Modestovich, that a neutron is better than an A-bomb?

Explain to him, Petrovich.

Well, you see, Gustav, if it's an A-bomb, or an H-bomb, then it's curtains for everything. While if it's neutron, for us it's curtains, but the bottles still stand.

Go on, Matilda. Transcribe this, encode, and cable . . . By the way, Matilda, what kind of masquerade is that? [*The bear pushes Cecilia aside and approaches Matilda very closely from behind.*]

This is no masquerade, Mr. President. I decided to join the predators.

Whaaat?

Jesus Maria. She's off her rocker.

What a kid!

The predators. The family *Felinae*. Leopards, to be precise.

And may I know why?

First of all, Mr. President, because history is over.

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And?

When history ends, zoology begins. We've already got democracy, yet I am still young. Therefore, my future is nature. More exactly, the jungle. In the jungle, it is either the strongest who survives, or the one with the best mimicry. The leopard is an ideal fusion of the former and the latter. Plus, I am a female. The period of pregnancy is ninety days. The litter: up to five kittens. This, you must agree, is far better than my original characteristics. To swim and climb trees, that I can already do. The length of tail reaches ninety centimeters, even an artificial one.

And how do you intend to turn it into a natural one?

The first step is inner identification. The thorough study of the character. The selection of diet: raw meat . . .

You mean steak tartare?

Yes, considering our geographic location. Then meditation. Also, excursions into the landscape. Exercises in orientation without compass and sharpening of the sense of smell. Plus long-distance running over varied terrain. If in camouflage, then better from Dior or Givenchy, but it's better without, since our supply is irregular.

Ah, but this is pure Stanislavsky! The Method!

Yeah, the naked man on the naked earth.

Actually, a naked wench on the naked . . .

Petroooovich.

Yeah, like the old days with the partisans . . .

Without the patriotic pathos, though.

Ech . . .

Those were the days . . .

You know what I mean . . .

In other words, a sort of Mowgli, but inside out?

Precisely, Mr. President. Absolutely honestly, I see nothing ahead but animals. The combination of human appearance with beastly mores doesn't satisfy me; nor, for that matter, the other way around. I am for purity of evolutionary theory, not to mention practice. The future for me is in absolute freedom, and a leopard, if you will, is my utopia. Besides, they're widespread in China, India, Central Asia, and Northern Africa. Encountered in paintings and sculpture, not to speak of heraldry. And in antiquity Pompey and Caesar Augustus introduced them to Rome. That's why currently I'm studying Latin.

Commendable, commendable. But what is to become of your French, English, and German? Not to mention the Slavic ones. Or the local . . .You've got

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diplomas, after all. And in musicology as well.

For that, Mr. President, there is the subconscious. In plain parlance, memory. In humans, it's in the occiput, or, more exactly, in the hypothalamus, which is but a reduced tail. In leopards, as I told you, it reaches ninety centimeters.

Swell.

And when do you anticipate going wild ultimately? That is, when do you give notice?

Considering the pace of training, Mr. President, by the next elections.

Even if I'm going to be reelected?

I'm afraid, yes.

Okay, thank you for warning me. Go ahead, type.

Yes, sir. [*To the bear.*] Get off my ass, bastard. [*Snarls.*] RRRR!

[*The bear, in terror, slinks away. In sprightly fashion, Matilda exits.*]

N-yes. Generation gap.

We are to wilt, they to blossom.

Off her rocker, I guess.

No, more likely it's the pressure.

Just an indication of universal beastliness. The long and the short of it . . .

No, Gustav, you go too far.

Do I? And who stampedes to the stadium?

But that's a mob. A demonstration.

For you a mob is a demonstration. In our language it's a herd.

Well, on a closer look . . .

Precisely: rhinoceroses, rams, cattle.

Goats!

And all of them pushing somewhere. It interferes with the traffic. I can't take my poodle . . .

Traffic? And what's traffic? Especially from a distance . . .

Certainly quadrupeds . . .

Kind of dinosaurish . . .

Beastly, indeed . . .

What's remarkable is that they still have disagreements.

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The goat doesn't consider the ram an animal.

A kind of nationalism, isn't it?

More exactly racism.

Chauvinism in any case.

Set them free and they'll rip each other's throats.

She sure can handle Teddy, though.

Uh-huh. It works. Especially since he's inanimate.

For you, Cecilia, he's inanimate. But for Matilda . . .

Petroovich!

What, Petrovich? Look at that – an erection!

But that's the camera, Petrovich.

Then it's permanent.

Big deal, permanent! Just on pills . . . Big deal.

Big deal? Uninterrupted transmission? And sometimes even mug shots? Pan. Pan. Mug shot. Pan. Pan. Mug shots. Diaphragm . . .

Looks like you've forgotten how it's done, Cecilia . . .

Petrovich, how dare you!

Indeed, Petrovich.

Ah. [*Dismissive gesture.*] They are sitting now, I guess, out there in the West, staring at the screen and grinning. And on the screen – it's us.

N-yes. This they won't understand.

This, Gustav, nobody can understand. [*Pause.*]

On the other hand, they've got a clearer picture.

But with commercial interruptions.

And she said, "permanent."

Permanent, but with interruption.

Why don't we just strip down to our underpants and wave a box of cornflakes.

Or ketchup.

It might only confuse them.

Just as well.

And what's so good about that, Petrovich?

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What's good is that if we can't comprehend what's going on, neither should they.

Well, I guess it's the only chance to swap places with them at the moment . . .

[*With these words, all four – plus the bear, who records the whole scene – get up and approach the front of the stage, one holding a box of cornflakes, the other a ketchup bottle, a carton of Marlboros, and so forth. What follows is a pantomime of an advertisement, gestures, grins, and all, for about thirty seconds. After that, they stare for a while into the audience.*]

See anything?

No. And you, Petrovich?

Eh . . . snow falling. Or is it interference?

Interference is what only they could have. For us – snow.

[*They shuffle back to their places.*]

Don't think we can sell them anything.

N-yes. Not with our visual characteristics.

Not even their own products.

Not to mention what's manufactured locally.

Nor can we buy anything.

That's perhaps a consolation.

Yeah, the castling didn't work.

Still, a pat.

All that remains are the loans.

With monstrous interest.

As I said, pat.

Ten percent is monstrous? You think, Gustav, that our ten percent is monstrous?

But I'm not speaking about you – eh, us. About the nation.

But there's a whole ninety percent that remains for them.

That's the point. Since this very ninety percent comes with twenty percent interest. The nation will never be able to pay that back. Neither in this generation nor in the next. Even if we start to multiply like microbes. Petrovich is right, pat indeed.

Then perhaps we should not leave them ninety? So as not to burden the nation. Let's leave them eighty. But even that is a bit too much . . . Let's leave them, say, seventy, so that the women won't rupture themselves, no? After all, we can take

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thirty percent upon ourselves, no? And it will be simpler for computer. What do you think, Basil Modestovich?

On the whole, it's a sin to deny the nation the joys of the flesh. Especially in a democracy.

But it's not democracy that denies, it's the Bundesbank.

Same thing, nowadays.

Comes with the Protestant work ethic.

Right. No siesta.

Hard if you're a Catholic.

For an Orthodox, too.

Not to mention agnostics.

Poor flesh.

Let's discuss this at tomorrow's session. It's getting kind of late.

Thirty percent we can still manage . . .

Ah, I always dreamt of having a swimming pool. The bottom could be laid out with mosaics, like the ancient Romans. Better still, a large TV screen. You splash around and watch the news. Or the movies.

Tomorrow, we'll discuss all that tomorrow, Cecilia. Matildaaaaaa!

[*Enter Matilda with the same animal-like bouncing walk, dragging three stuffed leopards on a leash.*]

Still playing house, are we?

Character study, Mr. President. Imitation of the environment. Nothing can replace osmosis . . . Synthetics, of course; but the pattern, I am told, is highly authentic. The pigmentation constitutes coded information thus far eluding all attempts at deciphering. Most likely it's the animal kingdom's version of one's CV, or of a passport. A sort of ur-writ. [*Bends over a leopard.*] Urrrrr, urrrrr, urrrrrr.

Well, well. Have you transcribed the memo?

Yes, I have. Transcribed, encoded, cabled, got the reply, decoded, transcribed. Here it is.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [*Reads.*] Uh-huh. I see. The General Staff informs us that there's no twenty-megaton in stock: however, there are several one-hundred-megaton items that are available. Among them – and I quote – two compact models, the size of a sofa or a kitchen cupboard.

The sofa one, Basil Modestovich! The sofa-size!

As you wish, Cecilia. The sofa-size . . . Matilda, cable the General Staff we'll take

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the sofa-size. Delivery within twenty-four hours, as before. Top secret.

Haven't they got anything smaller, though?

They say they don't. But what's wrong with the sofa-size, Gustav?

Transportation expenses, sir. Delivery.

But that's kopecks, Gustav.

A kopeck saves a ruble. That is . . . eee . . . where am I? A pfennig a mark. Gas prices are up.

The sofa is gratis, though.

Besides . . . not convertible. . .

The sofa or the ruble?

Stop bickering, you! So, where was I? Ah, yes . . . Twenty-four hours, as before. Top secret. Are you encoding?

Yes, sir.

Some secrecy! What about them? [*Nods toward leopards.*]

But they are inanimate.

Better check it out, though. That Bandylegs of yours is also inanimate, but look at the way he is ogling Matilda . . .

[*With these words, Petrovich gets up, carefully approaches the animals, and starts to stroke the first one.*]

Urrrr, urrrr, pussy, pussy . . .

[*Suddenly, with an abrupt motion, Petrovich sticks his hand under the animal's tail. No reaction.*]

Looks like . . . looks like you may be right . . .

[*Approaches the second animal.*]

Urrrr, urrrr . . . pussycat, pussy . . .

[*The same motion, the same result.*]

. . . that they are inanimate . . . But *do-ve-riyai no pro-ve-riyai* . . .

[*Approaches the third one.*]

That is, trust but check. Urrrr, urrr, urrr, pussy . . . What a luxurious tail . . . urrr, urrr, pussy . . .

[*Completely absorbed in his investigation, Petrovich sticks his hand under Matilda's tail.*]

Oho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!

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AAAAAAAI!!

Inanimate, you said!!!

Petroooovich! Petroooovich! Petrovich! Petrovich!

Inanimate, yes? Inanimate! Aha! and what's that? Spies! Mata Hari! Ooooooooh!

[*In this state of great agitation, Petrovich yanks his handcuffs out of his pocket, throws Matilda on the floor, half-intending arrest, half rape. He suddenly realizes the contradiction and freezes. General commotion. Gustav, Cecilia, and Boris Modestovich pull Petrovich and Matilda apart.*]

Mein Gott, you should be ashamed! Petrovich! Phe!

Oh my, that's some Stanislavsky for you . . .

This is *Matilda*, Petrovich.

[*Petrovich is in a catatonic state.*]

T-t-t-rust but ch-ch-ch-ec . . .

[*Matilda sobs.*]

N-yes, I'm afraid we'll have to switch over to the computer without waiting for the reelection.

[*Pause. Boris Modestovich approaches the sobbing Matilda.*]

Calm down, baby. He didn't mean to . . . It was unintentional. The pressure, you know. Under democracy one has to think of too many things at once.

Of two, to say the least.

I bet he thought of just one, Gustav.

From your point of view, Cecilia, everybody thinks only of one.

[*Matilda sobs. Boris Modestovich continues caressing her bare buttocks.*]

Calm down, calm down. The pressure, you know, it's too great. Even worse than under tyranny. For instance, one's got to think about [*Shoots a glance at the bear.*] the West. About the future. About the present, too. Whereas before, you see, it was just the East. Plus, naturally, the past . . . Two whole new [*His palm makes a wave over Matilda's behind.*] tenses just got added. The pressure, you know. Makes one's [*Brief gyration of the hips*] head swell. Makes it really explode . . . any minute . . .Well, what was I saying? Ah, yes. It was unintentional.

[*Matilda still sobs.*] Oh, yeah. Unintentional. Dirty beast.

But not a predator, Matilda, is he? Not a predator. [*Regains control of himself.*] Although of course a beast. A dirty old beast. Of all beasts, you know, man [*His*

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face shows a desperate struggle of wits with instinct.] is the most dangerous. Especially under democracy. The instincts, dormant under tyranny, wake up . . . Under democracy, even predators get it in the . . . neck from him. Even the leopards.

[*She is sobbing.*] In the future, in the future everything will be different . . .

Sure thing . . .

In the future . . . and he was trying to ruin it for me [*Sobs.*] . . . was trying to lo-o-o-o-ok into it . . . [*Breaks down into uncontrollable weeping and moaning.*]

Calm down, calm down . . . Oh, what is it with you, baby . . . And why would he try to look into it . . . into the future? What is it he's never seen there? [*A glance shot at Cecilia and Gustav.*] Believe me, he never thinks of it. [*His eyes slide down to Matilda's crotch.*] Not at all. I know him. Most likely, he's scared of it. Of malaises, for instance, or, say, a cemetery. And that's why he screams spies! Inanimate!

And Mata Hari –

Now, this I think is rather a compliment.

Especially if it's with Greta Garbo.

No, I for one prefer Jeanne Moreau.

No way. With me it's Marlene Dietrich.

[*Matilda stops crying, wipes her eyes, and caresses her animals.*] You are my very sweetest . . . you are my animate inanimate . . .

Yeah, there were good movies before history ended, no?

You are my pussycats . . . in the future everything will be different . . .

You, Matilda, indeed should see to having some kittens. When the animals are in the minority they can be easily domesticated. Take the locals, for instance . . .

And once they are in the majority?

Ain't such a sweet deal either. Pretty soon there is nothing to munch on, everything gets stamped out. Take superpowers for instance . . .

But those are herbivores . . .

Well, once there is nothing to munch on, the herbivores won't say no to meat either. Who knows, maybe that's how we wound up with predators.

But a carnivore is more likely to attack an herbivore than the other way around. For carnivores are essentially omnivores, whereas herbivores aren't. Take humans for instance . . .

Ah, herbivores, carnivores, omnivores, thermonuclears . . . What a bore.

Right. A man for instance . . .

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With this sort of thinking, baby, this zoology of yours might end real quick and again become history.

. . . for instance a man. Moreover, Charles Darwin. Survival of the fittest, or of the one with the best mimicry. The law of the jungle . . .

Ah, Matilda, Matilda. The fittest, the defeatest, the law of the jungle . . . Nobody survives, baby; but nobody. That's the real law of the jungle for you. As well as of the mixed woods, plains, mountains, and deserts. Nobody survives. Nobody, never. Nowhere. Tattoo it onto your butt. Or write in down on your tail. In your ur-characters. . . . Anyway, pick up this pen and take down some notes, now that you've recovered.

Yes, I am on my hind legs again.

Now, on with it. The agenda for tomorrow's cabinet session . . . Petrovich!

Ah? What? [*Strives to get back to his senses.*]

Button up your pants and hide the handcuffs. This concerns you as well.

Me? What?

The agenda for tomorrow's session . . . Now, the starting time is as usual: at lunch break. Any objections? No? Fine. The first item: Continuation of the national budget discussion. Secondly: Writing of proclamation to the nation about the scientific and technological modernization of the Cabinet's operations. In short, about introducing computer. Thirdly: The Interior Minister's report on the intelligentsia's reaction to the new decrees against beggars. Fourth: Miscellaneous. That's all. Enough for tomorrow, not to mention today. [*Stands up.*]

But how about the unveiling of the monument, Mr. President?

What monument, Matilda?

To the Victims of History.

Oh. Clean forgot. When's that?

3:00 P.M., Mr. President.

Looks like it should be entrusted to Petrovich. I can't do it. I'll be tied up with the sofa. Petrovich, you take my Rolex.

Much obliged. Much . . .

But he is Internal Affairs, Mr. President. It's sort of awkward. Victims of History after all. Maybe you should try Gustav.

But he is Finance . . .On the other hand, though, only he can count them all. Gustav!

Yes.

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You take my Rolex.

Danke.

Basil Modestovich, maybe it's better if I go. May I? Besides, I don't need Rolex, I live nearby.

Perfect. Ideal. Thank you, Cecilia. "Minister of Culture Unveils Monument to Victims of History." The press will love it – Western especially. By the way, where in the end did they decide to erect it? In front of the prison?

No, the maternity ward.

CURTAIN

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BOOKS

A Man of Our Century

THURSDAY'S CHILD HAS FAR TO GO. A MEMOIR OF THE JOURNEYING YEARS. By Walter Laqueur. Charles Scribner's Sons. $30.00.

Walter Laqueur's memoir describes the journey from his childhood and adolescence in Breslau before it became part of the Eastern Bloc, to Palestine before it became Israel, and to post-World War Two Europe before it was integrated into NATO or the European Community. But the personal elements of this journey, though prominent in the first section of the book, are no more than a backdrop to Laqueur's own life. Self-examination and self-revelation are set aside as he relives the critical slice of world history he has observed since Hitler came to power in 1933. That the author is a self-taught historian, that he "accidentally" became a journalist, frees the book of the so-called scholarship and theorizing many historians feel obliged to include in their works, whether in the interest of the discipline or of their careers. Most of all, it frees him of parochial concerns, allowing him to look critically at events he witnessed, to report them as he saw them. If "birds of a feather flock together," then Laqueur has flown with the best minds of our century and seen through many of the less astute ones – even those celebrated by the rest of the world, among them Jean-Paul Sartre and Hannah Arendt.

Though a member of the last generation of Jews with conscious memories of growing up in Weimar Germany, Laqueur tells us in his preface that he "did not want to write a requiem." However, as he introduces us to Breslau by recounting the impressions of his only return visit, in 1960, he *does* write a requiem: most of the former citizens had left; the neighborhood he grew up in had been razed during World War II; Breslau had become truly Polish and few people any longer spoke German. His former Jewish classmates either had perished at Auschwitz or had found refuge in Britain, the United States, or on kibbutzes; most of the others who did not die in the war had moved to small or large towns in the western part of Germany.

By means of his family history, Laqueur disproves some of the stereotypes about German Jews: the Laqueurs were not rich; they lived in a small apartment; his father "worked in town or traveled," and Walter didn't have many toys. Among his far-flung relatives, who had been in

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Germany for centuries, some but not all were secular; they lived in a number of nearby villages and towns, in Alsace and Lorraine, and in Silesia; a few had emigrated to the U.S. and even to Russia. Most were well-educated; a number had served in the German Army during World War One. They were strongly identified with Germany and thus believed that the Nazis would spare them. He corrects, among other things, the taken-for-granted notion that all teachers in Germany were sadists and tyrants, by recalling those who had been influenced by the *Wandervögel*, a majority of whom were "in favor of opting out of this sinful world altogether. Both Left and Right [of the *Wandervögel*] were hostile to soul-destroying capitalism, materialism, the alienation of man." Laqueur himself joined this movement in 1933, at the age of twelve. In 1938, after he graduated from the Gymnasium and was not allowed either to work or study in Germany, or to emigrate to England, he joined the *Werkleute* (a faction of the *Wandervögel*) in Frankfurt – to prepare himself for life in Palestine. Ultimately, he managed to leave on the eve of what has come to be known as *Kristallnacht*.

In the subsequent pages, Laqueur recounts his experiences – as a university student, a kibbutznik, an employee in a workshop – during the British Mandate before partition, the formation of the Jewish state, and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war which fueled the tensions that form the backdrop of the current negotiations for peace. His cool assessment of daily occurrences, which he manages to reconstruct vividly with the help of his own dispatches as a foreign correspondent (beginning in 1946), and his thorough research in archives ought to be consulted by anyone involved in the present mediations. For Laqueur stays away from global assessments and theories of foreign relations. Instead, he provides the history, including the petty and far-reaching quarrels among the multicultural Jews and the equally multicultural Arabs; he explains his own early pro-Arab stance; the gradual polarization under the British Mandate; how the border to Syria, "little more than an abstraction" in 1938, became "in later years . . . a dangerous, deadly reality." Alongside accounts of the deteriorating political climate, we read about the intellectual ferment of the Pilegesh circle, which included members such as George Lichtheim, Hans Lewy, Gershom Scholem, and Hans Jonas.

In 1943, Laqueur writes, "open conflict between Jews and Arabs had virtually disappeared" in Jerusalem. But the activities of the Irgun (who declared war on the British in 1944) and the Stern gang were disruptive, and Laqueur "found their views repulsive and dangerous." He covered the conference of the chief protagonists of Jewish-Arab cooperation, "the guardians of the flame of humanism, the moral conscience of the community," among them Martin Buber and Jehuda Magnes, who advocated

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a binational state based on full equality. But few young people, and not a single Arab, attended. The Arab League had been founded the year before: the Arab leaders expected the Jews to "return to where they had come from," to allow only those who had lived in Palestine before 1917 to remain.

Quotations from Laqueur's day-by-day dispatches give the flavor of the increasing crescendo that culminated in war. These dispatches are interspersed with descriptions of the consequences of the polarization for citizens who had to move frequently and put up with ever-worsening living conditions. His own wedding to his wife Naomi took place "in the middle of an air raid, with rings that had been borrowed, and with building workers from a nearby site as witnesses." But such hardship was taken in stride in view of the fate of the surviving Jews from Europe who were not allowed to land on the shores of Palestine, who were turned back under British pressure, and those who had landed illegally and were deported to overcrowded camps in Cyprus. Most of the Jewish community dissociated itself from the terrorist bombing of the King David Hotel and knew little about British anti-terrorist tactics. As we know, the increasingly deteriorating situation eventually led the British to ask the United Nations to establish a commission that would recommend partition, which, when instituted, ensued in the siege of Jerusalem.

Even before Jerusalem was divided, Laqueur, in his capacity as a journalist, had come to to know the individuals who would subsequently rise in Israeli politics, and all of the dignitaries who visited from abroad. After the 1948 war, the Jerusalem newspaper Laqueur wrote for, *Hamishmar*, focused more on local events and municipal concerns than international politics. Because "daily journalism provided instant but not lasting gratification," and Laqueur "still had much to learn," he turned to freelance writing, gave weekly radio talks on world politics, and developed his knowledge of Western Europe, the Soviet empire and the Arab world. In 1951 he went to Europe for the first time since emigrating in 1938. Eventually he spent more and more time in Paris and London, before settling in the United States.

Despite the generally pro-Soviet mood among intellectuals, Laqueur had few illusions about impending liberalization: he distrusted the cult of Stalin, was troubled by information about concentration camps and the secret police, and thus was not surprised by the new wave of show trials and the Cold War. Because his wife had relatives in Essentuki, in the northern Caucasus, Laqueur could visit Russia regularly – always being careful to behave as an apolitical foreigner – and got to understand Russian culture. It seems to me that living in Germany between 1932 and 1938 had sensitized Laqueur to the dangers of creeping totalitarianism and

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to the need to eradicate it at its roots. This need for vigilance overrides the customary right/left political divide. So whereas the majority of liberal minds turned soft on Communism (and then looked to various forms of socialism) as the antidote to fascism, Laqueur was one of the few who felt compelled to go against both right-wing and left-wing extremisms, to be a truly independent intellectual. Laqueur mentions that he sometimes was wrong; but it is to his credit that he does not gloat over having been correct so often. Inevitably, he met nearly every important political leader, and he would become friends with such people as Raymond Aron, George Lichtheim, Nahum Goldman, Arthur Koestler, and Richard Lowenthal. All of them were immensely enlightened figures, and they all have been vindicated by history. Each generation, I believe, produces only a few individuals who can combine objective research with subjective insights, and who then have the courage and the stamina to stand alone against the "herd of independent minds." Laqueur ends his memoir by saying he had luck. Yes, but in addition he had honesty and ambition, and the modesty not to dwell on the details of his life, but to deal primarily with his "encounters with history."

EDITH KURZWEIL

The Music of James

MEANING IN HENRY JAMES. By Millicent Bell. Harvard University Press. $42.50.
HENRY JAMES AND THE PAST. By Ian Bell. St. Martin's Press. $45.00.

These Bells make different sounds. Millicent Bell gives us the music of James, its internal logic, which in criticism we first heard in Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*. Ian Bell provides a more up-to-date, market-oriented James in the service of an economy of consumption. Which is not to say that Millicent Bell doesn't provide us with fresh analytic perspectives, especially on the matter of plot, or that Ian Bell is utterly

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impervious to the literary character of James's achievement (Ian Bell in fact refers generously to Millicent Bell's work), but the sensibilities at play in these two works are contrasting sensibilities. They offer us an opportunity to reflect upon alternative approaches to literary study.

The argument of Millicent Bell's study concentrates on the disparity that James perceived between the potentialities of self and the limiting conditions of social existence. In narrative terms, this translates into a dissonance between character and plot. James's protagonists (Isabel Archer, Hyacinth Robinson, Lambert Strether), surrogates for his own imagination of possibility, experience plot, which for Aristotle is the very soul of drama, as inimical to their fulfillment, because plot threatens to degrade the self to material and social forms or to confine it to a single outcome and therefore rob it of its multifariousness. Bell notes how in reviewing his notebooks James rediscovered possibilities and outcomes for his stories that he had passed by, and how he regretted the suppressed alternatives that characterize any individual life. But, as Bell convincingly demonstrates, without the enactment of character in a story, the potentiality of character turns into impotence and poverty. John Marcher of *The Beast in the Jungle* becomes, from this perspective, the *reductio ad absurdum* of the self's effort to maintain the fullness of its potentiality. True to the spirit of James, Bell does not attempt to resolve this ambiguity:

> . . . the gesture, the dream, the withholding of commitment to social forms that reduced the soul's best potential, this *is* a vision that takes account – by rejection – of a reducing reality, though the vision of freedom which imbues an Isabel Archer is proven to be an illusion.

The ambiguity is sustained by a continual and tantalizing deferral of a commitment to a particular outcome, and by inviting the reader, so Bell argues, to resist totalizing interpretations and to make a "succession of interpretations based on instant states." This corresponds to the drama of Strether's consciousness in *The Ambassadors*, but it should apply elsewhere in James's work.

The Jamesian narrative, according to Millicent Bell, thrives in the tension between an Emersonian aspiration for transcendence and a European-inspired knowledge of the limiting conditions of existence. The pathos of James's fiction derives from the exacerbation rather than the resolution of the tension. Milly Theale (of *The Wings of the Dove*) embodies this tension:

> It is Milly who must finally face the inevitability of her own death,

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> must realize – sooner and more sharply than most persons – that the mere fact of being human exposes one to circumscriptions more absolute than poverty. Still, her ability to act freely persists. She asserts the survival of her own potentiality, asserts James's romantic faith in the human will, acting even in her dying to fulfill her own curious prediction, "since I've lived all *these* years as if I were dead, I shall die no doubt, as if I were alive."

The received wisdom about James is that he inverted the Aristotelian hierarchy which privileges plot over character. But Millicent Bell shows with great subtlety how plot, in its various meanings of intrigue, conspiracy and narrative, works in contradictory fashion to test, oppose, and reveal character. One casualty of the Jamesian narrative is the marriage plot, which no longer promises the happy resolution that one finds in much of Victorian "realist" fiction. Marriage does not close *Portrait of a Lady*, it fails in the middle of the novel and makes possible Isabel Archer's awareness of the inhospitality of the world to the dream of plenitude. The effect of Bell's reading is to make character and plot, the main constituents of narrative, the very content of James's fiction. Without losing connection to realism, the novels become allegories of the making of fiction.

Despite his several admiring references to the work of Millicent Bell, Ian Bell's focus is elsewhere. His study oscillates between the Jamesian text and the consumer marketplace that emerged at the time of James's writing (1832-60). The logic of James's imagination, according to Ian Bell, participates in the logic of the marketplace. Thus *Washington Square* is an arena for competing market forces. Catherine Sloper, "the commodified Catherine, worth 'eighty thousand a year'," becomes the object of a competition among her father Dr. Sloper, her housekeeper Mrs. Penniman, and her suitor Townsend, "within the frozen world of market practice." Bell wants us "to see an intimate relationship between forms of writing, forms of history and forms of financial behavior." Bell does not declare his motive to be demystification of the moral-aesthetic idiom of the Jamesian text, but something like it seems to be at work when he chides other critics for discussing Townsend as a "heartless lover" or "an interloper," since "such categorization inevitably seals him off from material history."

The effect of such an approach is to displace our focus from the moral ambition of the fiction to its alleged complicity with what one may presume to be the very target of its criticism. At least this is the presumption of Millicent Bell when she writes about *Wings of the Dove*:

> In this novel James presents through symbolic action and language the

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> reflex of a commercial society in the recesses of public life. With extraordinary insight into the nature of modern experience, he recognizes that it is not sufficiently descriptive of modern man to say that he is subject to a market economy and constantly engaged in a contest for economic advantage. The competitive establishment of market value extends to those parts of a person, those aspects of behavior, once thought to have *incalculable* value.

Ian Bell is concerned with exposing what he believes to be the inadequacy of oppositions such as the calculable and the incalculable, the public and the private, given the imperializing force of the marketplace. Thus in his description of *The Bostonians* he speaks of "publicity [as] the agency whereby the world advertises and perpetuates itself," a "synecdoche for the changing culture in which all his characters are caught up." All that James can manage in the way of critique is an expression of distaste, "which fails to incorporate the diagnostic complexity we find in the fiction."

Ian Bell's account of the self in relation to society turns out to be quite different from Millicent Bell's. The self has lost its capacity for resistance: indeed, it seems to have lost its quiddity, becoming instead a function of the dynamism, the fluidity, the transformations of the marketplace. The private and the personal in a sense cease to exist, since the self has been taken over by publicity. An example is the spectacle of Verena as public performer in *The Bostonians*. Character becomes role; behavior becomes performance. Ian Bell resolves the moral tension that Millicent Bell finds in James's fiction, in the determinisms of the marketplace. Ian Bell, following Jean Baudrillard, speaks of a shift that occurs within the culture of consumption, to which James has been assigned the role of inadvertent witness, from the civic to the advertisable, from the public to publicity, the effect of which is to dissolve the person into personality.

Ian Bell's approach flattens the world of Jamesian fiction to one of "display, surface and performance." He speaks of James's ambivalent relation to it, but it would seem to be an ambivalence without force, since he finds so little in the narrative consciousness of the fiction to resist the culture of consumption. Missing from Ian Bell's discussion is the rich interiority, the sense of potentiality that figures so impressively in Millicent Bell's exposition of the fiction. This is not to deny that he has caught hold of something in his interpretations of *Washington Square*, *The Bostonians* and *The Europeans*, but the claim he makes hardly does justice to *Portrait of a Lady* or the late novels, which he mercifully does not study at any length.

It used to be an argument in favor of a critical performance that it was

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responsive to the texture of the work, that it gave back in its own language the idiom and spirit of the work being interpreted. A critic who performs in this manner nowadays is exercising an unfashionable virtue. Millicent's work is clearly the fruit of a long devotion; it is a superbly mediated study, a critical act with the greatest respect for the novelist's achievement. And it is enriched by a resourceful and sophisticated understanding of narrative theory. Ian Bell also admires James, but the terms of his admiration are defined by historical categories (the culture of production and the culture of consumption) that only partially fit the subject and that translate the Jamesian story into someone else's narrative. James's characters become allegorical figures in the triumphant emergence of a consumer culture in America. Even that story is taken for granted as representing a history in which James can be neatly placed and explained. Ian Bell cites a variety of scholarly sources on the culture of consumption, but gives us no clear persuasive account of its character or of what might be contending understandings of it. Ian Bell's study does not satisfy our curiosity about the story or stories that James *tells*; to satisfy our curiosity we turn to Millicent Bell.

EUGENE GOODHEART

Non-predicting the Fall of Communism

EAST EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVES. By Elemer Hankiss. Oxford: Clarendon Press. $72.00.

Understanding the political developments in Eastern Europe since the late 1980s remains a major intellectual challenge. Not only did Western students of Communism (including myself) fail to anticipate these events; even in retrospect they find it hard to explain them satisfactorily. To be sure, many attempts have been made and will continue to be made. Experts who took for granted the survival of the Soviet system are now telling the public why it could not have survived, why it was not viable, why the collapse was only a matter of time. But when Gorbachev emerged it was widely suggested and believed that whatever the problems

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of the Soviet Union, he would make it possible for the system to survive, in a more modern and benign incarnation.

Several dispositions made it difficult to anticipate the collapse of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Those involved with foreign policy – including of course the Bush administration and the State Department – preferred, as always, stability and the familiar; they did not like to think of a world without the Soviet Union and of the practical problems this would create. The various critics of the United States, and those who believed in the moral equivalence of the superpowers, were reluctant to envisage the demise of the Soviet Union and the political systems it supported, since this would have vindicated the United States, capitalism, and Western forms of government. In turn, the critics of the Soviet system, myself included, who regarded it as both morally repugnant and a threat, could not conceive of an "evil empire" so weak as to be on the verge of disintegration. Detractors of Communist systems believed that the malfunctioning and failures of these societies were irrelevant to their survival, at any rate in the foreseeable future, and that they could continue to stifle discontent, or at least prevent it from taking politically consequential forms.

East European Alternatives by Elemer Hankiss, a professor of political science at the University of Budapest and Director of Research at the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, addresses the almost total lack of conceptual or psychological preparedness in the West for the collapse of the Communist systems, and the continued confusion as to what this means for past assessments. Hankiss is among the elite of Hungarian intellectuals and social scientists who survived the Kadar decades with a remarkably Westernized outlook. In 1987 and 1988, he was a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC, working on a comparative study of East European and Western-type societies. Between 1991 and 1992, he headed Hungarian Television, a position from which he was suspended by the government, under right-wing political pressure.

While political systems modeled after the Soviet one were initially imposed on Eastern Europe in a fairly uniform fashion, there was considerable diversity in the processes leading to the removal of the Soviet influences and institutions. Eastern Europeans, and Hungarians in particular, disagree as to how important Soviet internal change was for developments in Eastern Europe. However, it is safe to say that the former satellites of the Soviet Union would not have unraveled without Soviet acquiescence. Still, the explanation of these developments cannot be derived solely from the disintegration of the Soviet center. Hungary is a good case in point, and Hankiss documents with an abundance of data the indigenous sources

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of change that culminated in the transfer of power at the end of the 1980s.

To what degree one can generalize from the case of Hungary to Eastern Europe as a whole is, of course, another debatable matter. Hankiss shows that Hungary was the most liberalized of the Soviet dependencies in Eastern Europe and the most Westernized. (The historically more advanced political Westernization of Czechoslovakia was suppressed and set back both in the late 1940s and after 1968.) While entitled "East European Alternatives," the book is actually a detailed examination and social-historical analysis of the Communist system in Hungary from its beginnings in the late 1940s to its end in 1989, with occasional references to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Thus it is not quite clear to what extent one can generalize from conditions in Hungary (which used to be described as "the most cheerful barrack in the camp of socialism") to the rest of Eastern Europe. In Hungary "reform Communism" went the furthest. But for that very reason Hungary also showed the limits of the reformability of state socialist systems, which makes it a uniquely interesting case. In Hungary, Hankiss states, "the scope of action of the ruling elite . . . was strongly restrained . . . by external and internal factors – so much so that it never had the freedom it claimed to have, and that people thought it had, to transform Hungary . . . to the extent it wanted to." Hungary was also unique since in 1956 it had had a genuine and bloody revolution, such as none of the other Soviet satellites had. The Revolution was "a learning experience" both for the Hungarian Communist leaders and the population. Although ruthlessly crushed, it led on the one hand to a regime inclined to compromise, and on the other to a widespread apolitical mentality among the people. Hungary became a "soft" authoritarian regime; and moving from a soft authoritarian regime to political pluralism was easier to accomplish (and understand) than similar changes in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, or Albania.

Unlike many analysts, Hankiss is acutely aware of the darker side of the "politics of liberalization" in Hungary:

> It kept society in a diffuse and inarticulate state, in a childish dependence; it deprived people of efficient institutions of interest intermediation and participation; it was unable to develop an efficient economic model and mechanism; it liberalized people without giving them rights and real freedom.

Nonetheless, the peaceful and orderly transfer of power by the Communist oligarchy was a remarkable accomplishment. Hankiss explains it in part by examining the hopes (mistaken, as it turned out) this group

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entertained of retaining or reestablishing its power in the new system through more democratic means.

There were other reasons as well for the oligarchy to give up: the deepening economic crisis, and the precipitous decline of living standards since the early 1980s, which called into question the so-called "social contract," the tacit acceptance of the regime by the population in exchange for improved living standards and non-interference in private lives. In addition, the party was increasingly taken over or influenced by a younger generation of leaders; it also became clear after Gorbachev's rise to power that the Soviet Union would not, as in 1956, save the regime from being overthrown by its own people.

Despite the beneficial effects and byproducts of a long period of "soft Communism" and what it entailed – decline of regimentation, enlarged freedom of expression, an acceptance by the authorities of the separation of the private and the public realm, a greater tolerance for private enterprise, and so on – Hankiss is not optimistic about the long-term prospects of political democracy in Hungary. The past is likely to weigh heavily on the present and future. Hankiss reports that as of 1978 Hungary had a lower level of social participation (defined as the belief that people can do something against measures that offend their interests) than Turkey or Mexico. But he also notes that, surprisingly enough, by 1989 "this infantilistic dependence of the population on the political leadership [had] vanished." He is most concerned with a spiritual or value crisis that will linger on:

> If people . . . cannot rely on a relatively strong and consistent value system, they lose one of the most important organizing principles and regulatory forces in their lives. If their values are destroyed, it will be much more difficult for them to preserve . . . their sense of social responsibility. This is what happened in Hungary after 1948. The destruction was far-reaching, or almost total. As a consequence . . . Hungarian society is still in a profound spiritual and moral disarray.

The reader may also wonder whether or not Hankiss is an historical or economic determinist, or merely a pessimist, as Hungarians and Hungarian intellectuals are reputed to be. He writes in a concluding postscript:

> To create and run democratic systems in countries with a per capita gross national product of between $2,500 and $3,000 will be a heroic endeavor. . . . Political despotism has collapsed, but the iron laws of economy will keep the country in a forced orbit.

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There is a more ambitious purpose behind his analysis of social-political change and its prospects in Hungary. Hankiss also wants to arrive at a more differentiated understanding of the idea of freedom. He offers an interesting and unusual tally of the types of freedoms, distinguishing among fourteen different kinds. He points out:

> . . . there was one type of freedom in Eastern Europe more difficult to acquire in the West . . . the freedom of living outside the system in which they lived; the freedom of not identifying themselves with the system; the freedom of looking at it . . . from the outside. This non-involvement, this ironic distance, this involuntary detachedness, may have been painful and dangerous, but it was a rare and invaluable human privilege.

One may be tempted to call this type of freedom "alienation."

While the goal of Hankiss was – among others – to present a more realistic picture of the power of the Communist elite in Hungary, in contrast to earlier visions of its omnipotence, this has not led him to an embrace of the notion of moral or structural equivalence between East and West (i.e., we have our elites, they have their elites, both are amoral, both cling to power, neither is as powerful as they would like to be, and so on). He does not forget that the systems in Eastern Europe had their own peculiar ideological underpinnings: they were not simply a version of already industrialized societies being modernized or of contemporary authoritarian systems. He traces the failure of these systems to their ideological roots, which included the desire "to replace the anarchy of the market with the rational order of planning." More generally:

> Nineteenth and early twentieth century socialist programmes and ideologies in general, and Marxism-Leninism in particular, wanted to replace bourgeois rationality (or irrationality) with "a superior type of rationality." They were convinced that they had a scientific knowledge of the laws of history and that they were able to build up an entirely rational society . . . they landed in a "unfathomable morass" of irrationality. Hyperrationality turned into "lunatic irrationalism."

Even for a lifelong observer of Eastern European and Soviet Communism, there are hazards in writing about that part of the world, given the unsettled state of these countries and their political systems. While *East European Alternatives* is a first-rate guide to the historical background and stages of change in Hungary (and to a lesser extent Eastern Europe as a whole), no book written about this region can count on re-

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maining up-to-date, given the speed of social-political transformations in the formerly Communist states. Much has transpired since this book was written that alters or qualifies certain of the author's "scenarios" for change. It is, for example, not clear if indeed a "grand coalition," or a new ruling class composed of emerging entrepreneurs and former members of the Communist bureaucracy, has emerged or is in the process of emerging. Nevertheless, this is an invaluable study for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the nature and problems of the transition from Communist to pluralist systems. The book comes with a useful summary of the major events in Hungarian history, and an excellent bibliography that includes both Hungarian and Western sources. Last but not least, this is a thought-provoking book – and far more than a case study of political change – because it also addresses and helps to settle a major issue of our times: the reformability of Communist systems.

PAUL HOLLANDER

Freud's Jewish Myths

FREUD'S MOSES. JUDAISM TERMINABLE AND INTERMINABLE. By Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. Yale University Press. $25.00.
FREUD AND MOSES. THE LONG JOURNEY HOME. By Emanuel Rice. State University of New York Press. $59.00 cloth. $19.95 paper.

> I thought I would search their house, Grandmother, for something Jewish that they took out at night, something that might refute his declaration, although, in fact, I had no idea what anything Jewish might look like or how to go about finding it.
>
> -from *Mr. Mani* by A. B. Yehoshua

Thus does a German soldier stationed in Crete in 1944 explain his dilemma: how can he prove his hunch that a certain Ephraim Mani is a Jew? After all, Mani has just declared to him, "I was Jewish, but I'm not anymore. . . . I've canceled it." Intrigued by this concept of "canceling," the young German imagines a future use for it. "I understood," he adds, "that if that stubborn beastly essence of Jewishness can cancel its own self, then there's hope for us too."

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Sigmund Freud perhaps never consciously realized how anxious he was to "cancel" parts of his complex and at times cumbersome Jewish identity. Taking him at his word, or at least some of his words, Freud's biographers have repeatedly explained away his Jewishness as aggressively secular or, appropriating Freud's own term, "inessential," *wesenfremd*. This "inessentialness" was curiously, if inadvertently, reflected in the 1991 traveling exhibition of antiques from Freud's study. With the exception of the exhibit at New York City's Jewish Museum, not a single of Freud's twenty Jewish artifacts appeared at any of the exhibit's various installations. The overlooking of so many Jewish items from his collection, such as a Hanukkah menorah and an engraving of Rembrandt's *Moses Breaks the Tablets of the Law*, parallels the persistent glossing-over that numerous clues to Freud's "Jewish problem" have been given. As Yosef Yerushalmi astutely points out in the exhibit's catalogue, "We did not see the kiddush cups because, aware of Freud's well-known contempt for religious ritual, we did not expect to see them there."

The publication of Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses* (the dust jacket of which is graced by a reproduction of Freud's own Moses engraving) and Emanuel Rice's *Freud and Moses* have prompted a radical reconsideration of Freud's Jewishness. Both books arrive independently at strikingly similar conclusions and deal extensively with the troubling and troublesome *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud's only book to deal specifically with Jewish themes. Neither Yerushalmi, a distinguished historian who has devoted much of his writing to Jewish themes (his best-known book is *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*), nor Emanuel Rice, a psychiatrist, had any trouble recognizing, as one of A. B. Yehoshua's character puts it, "what anything Jewish might look like or how to go about finding it." The results of their extensive searches through the paper trail Freud left behind, however unconsciously, are intriguing, illuminating, and disturbing. For those who have invested Freud with an aura of detached secularism, this dramatic pair of books must be quite distressing, as the melee which broke out at the December 1991 meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association in New York made rather clear.

At that meeting, Dr. Rice, drawing from his book, tried to show that the Freud family was "far more involved with Jewish religion and tradition than has been reflected in the public image," accusing past scholars of missing the Jewishness of Freud because they did not "share the background" of the Freud parents, and because – here Rice must certainly have struck a nerve – Freud's biographers wanted to see Freud as they saw or hoped to see themselves, as "urbane people of Western culture and enlightenment." Those with heavy psychological or professional investments in the belief that Freud was less Jewish than Rice's portrayal accused Rice

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of trying to "reenlist" Freud as a Jew, implying that he was essentially calling Freud a liar. None of this fuss would have ensued were it not for the fact that Freud did write *Moses and Monotheism*, which Rice sees as both "a love story, in aggressive garb, between father and son," and, most pointedly, "an attempt to come home to his Jewish roots."

From its inception, *Moses and Monotheism* troubled Freud as well as his critics. In Freud's version of biblical events, Moses was an Egyptian who derived the idea of monotheism from Egyptian concepts. After Moses passed on the idea of monotheism to the Jews, the Jews murdered him, then sought to repress this horrific deed in their collective memory. Yerushalmi stresses:

> whatever one's stance on [its] tortuous issues, *Moses and Monotheism* remains, at its core, a deliberately Jewish book. . . . If the book can be read as a final chapter in Freud's lifelong case history, it is also a public statement about matters of considerably wider consequence – the nature of Jewish history, religion and peoplehood, Christianity and anti-Semitism – written at a tragic historical juncture.

Yerushalmi's interest in Freud, he insists persuasively,

> does not stem from any need to claim him for an already crowded Jewish pantheon. Long ago I serenely relinquished Columbus to Italy and Santa Teresa of Avila, despite her Jewish grandfather, to Spain. I could yield Freud with equal equanimity, but the nature of his life and work will not allow it.

Yerushalmi's overriding concern is Freud's intentionality: why did he publish such an inflammatory book in 1939, just as the Nazis' wish to be rid of Jews was so very obvious, despite an avalanche of entreaties from his colleagues not to go through with it, knowing "that Jewry will be very offended"? Yerushalmi suggests that it was, for Freud,

> the shock of anti-Jewish barbarism [that] brought the question to a new existential urgency, [providing] the immediate impulse to the actual writing of *Moses and Monotheism*. . . . In 1933 the fate of psychoanalysis had intertwined directly with the actual fate of the Jewish people. For a man of Freud's intellectual intensity the earlier vague phrases about Jewish identity could no longer suffice. He had finally to confront what he would soon call "the fateful content of the religious history of the Jews."

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Freud's almost lifelong identification with Moses parallels his obsession with the writing of this book, which tormented him, as Freud said, "like an unlaid ghost." Its text, Yerushalmi notes, "seems to reflect the difficulties Freud experienced while composing it. It is riddled with apologies, hesitations, repetitions." Its tone is "deliberately austere, *wissenschaftlich*. Unlike his letters and his talks with fellow-Jews, the book refers to the Jews as 'they' rather than 'we.' By now we should recognize such distancing as strategic and not be misled by it."

This "strategic distancing," as both Yerushalmi and Rice understand it, arose from Freud's very conscious wish that his brainchild, psychoanalysis, not be seen as a Jewish "national affair" or a Jewish science, but as something more universal. This distancing continued in various guises, and without calling Freud a liar, both Yerushalmi and Rice note how hard Freud worked to create a family romance, distancing himself and his parents from their Orthodox-Jewish Eastern European roots. Freud's adolescence, Rice writes, was "marked by an ethnic self-hatred that would make an anti-Semite proud." Rice presents us with a cache of photocopied documents from Viennese archives, explaining that Freud's previous biographers perpetuated the Freud family fiction "because they appear not to have grasped the full implications of the available data." He maintains that Freud was motivated by the common Viennese middle-class desire "to overcompensate by being as German and middle-class in their cultural and intellectual interests and values as the non-Jewish middle class, if not more so." Scrutinizing the Freud family Bible and the elaborate and learned Hebrew dedication written inside a book given by Freud's father to his son on his thirty-fifth birthday, Rice comments that an extremely assimilated father would simply have been unable to write such a dedication and that he certainly would not have written it to a son who knew no Hebrew:

> Such incongruities can occur but are most unlikely. . . . Freud's "aggressive atheism," a phrase [Peter] Gay repeatedly uses . . . is not really as aggressive as Gay portrays it to be. . . . It would appear that despite Freud's intense wish for the riddance of religion, there is another part, not too far beneath the surface, which yearns for its retention in its original Orthodox form.

This particular "yearning" is only one of the controversial and curious matters that crop up at every turn when thinking about the intersection of Freud's writing and his Jewishness. Why did Freud so repeatedly disavow any real knowledge of either Hebrew or Yiddish? Why did he pretend not to know about Jewish holidays, culture, and rituals? And why did he

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try to project an image of himself as having been raised in a family with minimum Jewish observance and scant Jewish education – all essentially nontruths? Yerushalmi follows a slightly different paper trail than does Rice; as he sees it, Freud was both Godless and a Jew:

> a combination . . . many others then and now could not fathom . . . In the turbulent process of social and cultural change that accompanied the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment), there emerged that modern species of "gottloser Jude" whom we know as "the secular Jew."

Yerushalmi observes how Freud stubbornly insisted

> on defining himself "via *negationis*," by a series of reductions. He is not a Jew by religion, or in national terms, or through language . . . and yet in some profound sense he remains a Jew. . . . At every turn are hints and fragments that challenge the images Freud publicly projected. . . . Beyond any detail, the very violence of Freud's recoil against Jewish religious belief and ritual must arouse our deepest suspicion.

Both Rice and Yerushalmi make a strong argument that had *Moses and Monotheism* not been penned by Freud, it would have been ignored and dismissed. Based on outdated and long-discredited Bible scholarship, it is, as Rice notes, "highly flawed in data selection, methodology and validation." Yerushalmi's obsession with this opaque Moses book (his own *Freud's Moses* took him nine years to write) elicits some important questions, to which he proposes answers that are both boldly original and daring. In the fourth section of Yerushalmi's book, entitled "Monologue with Freud," he directly addresses "most highly esteemed Professor Freud":

> I think that in your innermost heart you believed that psychoanalysis is itself a further, if not final, metamorphosed extension of Judaism, divested of its illusory religious forms but retaining its essential monotheistic characteristics, at least as you understood and described them. In short, I think you believed that just as you were a godless Jew, psychoanalysis is a godless Judaism.

Yerushalmi feels that as an historical essay, *Moses and Monotheism* offers

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> a single vision of history as essentially a story of remembering and forgetting . . . analogous to Freud's conception of the life history of an individual. What has been overlooked is how strangely analogous it is also to the biblical conception of history, where the continual oscillation of memory and forgetting is a major theme through all narratives of historical events. . . . The primary biblical imperative is the command to remember, not to forget."

The Hebrew Bible, Yerushalmi reminds us and, by extension, Freud, *never* represses memories of sins and transgressions, but reminds the reader of them repeatedly. Thus, had the Jews actually killed Moses, this deed would have been both the worst of their transgressions and also the most written about, so that they would *never* be allowed to forget or repress it.

Rice argues that in *Moses and Monotheism*, the last leg of his "long journey home," Freud "set out to uncover a murder. Though the case is pinned on a rebellious horde of Hebrews, there is no question that at some level Freud understood he was himself the murdered, also the victim, also the accuser, also the judge." Yerushalmi similarly views Freud's complex Jewish identity as fraught, if not befuddled, with contradictions, as something that haunted him throughout his life, never resolved, to the exasperation of both Freud and his biographers. The questions raised by Rice and Yerushalmi are important ones, setting astir ripples that will undoubtedly provoke a continuing debate about the curious mirroring of Freud's willed forgetting of his Jewish past and his projected doubling of that amnesia onto his Jewish forefathers.

SUSAN MIRON

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Made in America

EQUAL DISTANCE. By Brad Leithauser. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.
RANSOM. By Jay McInerney. Vintage. $15.95.
BICYCLE DAYS. By John Burnham Schwartz. Summit Books. $18.95.

Japan is now a fashionable destination for Americans, in the way that only a place whose accessibility is shaded with enigma can be. Americans, who are less at home in the world than they pretend to be, prefer strangeness that is bronzed with the familiar, and Japan, with its modern cities, its bullet trains, its high-tech wizardry, and fairly stupefying adulation of banal and up-tempo Western music, emulates familiar terrain more adroitly than any other place in Asia, while at the same time remaining farther outside our field of vision socially than any other modern society. This half-moon aspect of Japan has been compared to *bunraku* puppet theater in which the puppeteers, robed and veiled in black, are officially invisible, though if you train your eyes directly on them, *voilá*. We are now in an age when watching the ghostly puppeteers rather than the brocaded puppets has come into season. This is especially true in the American business community, which is struggling with the fact that it has been hopelessly outflanked in almost every phase of its operations, from engineering to manufacturing to marketing, by a small, land-poor, resource-poor Asian nation that by any purely economic calculus should have had nothing more than a younger-brother relationship to America. Broadcasting their vexation in a vast outpouring of books with portentous titles like *The Coming War with Japan*; *Japan as Number One: Lessons for Americans*; *The Japanese Power Game: What it Means for America*; and *Japan's Growing Power over East Asia and the World Economy*, the business community has recently made a massive effort, fueled by America's failure to compete, to take Japan seriously.

A long and honorable history of American efforts to understand Japan on its own terms can be traced back to Ernest Fenollosa and Lafcadio Hearn – American at least by adoption – and continues with such contemporary critics and historians as Edwin Reischauer, Edward Seidensticker, Donald Keene, and Donald Richie, all of whom have lived in Japan and acquired its culture firsthand. And since Japan's dazzling emergence on the world scene as a major player in the 1970s, more than a generation of university-trained Americans have become casually familiar with its intricate language, working daily in the engineering labs at Sony

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and Toshiba, in the bowels of Sanwa and Sumitomo Banks, and especially in English-language classrooms and cram schools from Sapporo to Okinawa. Many of these Americans are married to Japanese, raising their children in bilingual households, and experiencing Japan the way the Japanese themselves experience it, from within the nest of its language, its institutions, its families. Thousands of Americans living in Japan now form a virtual army of expatriates for whom there is nothing inscrutable about Japanese domestic routines, business practices, or social customs. They even have their own organs of mutual support and ex-pat shoptalk, like *The Japan Times* and the Kansai region (Kyoto, Kobe, Osaka) journal *Kansai Time Out*. A blonde, Nordic-looking woman who has been a resident of Japan for twenty years, and who has mastered not only the common language but the subtleties of *keigo*, the elaborate system of other-exalting and self-abasing speech, boasted to me not long ago, "I am a *nihonjin*."

Strange to say, no one from this army has yet stepped forward with a novel about life as a transplanted *nihonjin*, though to know the handicaps of *nihonjin* existence – the cramped quarters in which privacy is elusive, the feverish life and temporary *Arbeit* that individuals in academic positions must suffer to make ends meet, the unavailability of such amenities as babysitting – is to understand why none of the ex-pats thus far has had the simple leisure to turn experience into fiction. Up until now, it has been the tourists and part-timers, the frequent flyers who have been fashioning our image of Japan, and since there are thousands of them, camping out in the accounting offices and software firms, the *zendos* and the *dojos*, sooner or later their adventure stories were bound to appear. Three in particular have found their way to the bestseller lists in the past several years: Brad Leithauser's *Equal Distance*, Jay McInerney's *Ransom*, and John Burnham Schwartz's *Bicycle Days*. It is with these books for the moment I am concerned; or rather, bothered, since they are the leading edge of the new Orientalism in fiction. In a recent review of one of these novels, the *New York Times* reviewer hailed this new fiction, observing that what Paris had been for the expatriate generation of the 1920s, Japan had become for the 1980s: "an aesthetic pit stop, visited by the young heroes of American *Bildungsromans*."

In typical *Times* glib-speak fashion, there is an aperçu buried in the blurb, for Tokyo has indeed become a port of call for young Americans. Tokyo may well be the Paris of our time, with the Imperial Palace its Champs du Mars and Shinjuku its Left Bank, but there are differences between Paris in the twenties and Japan today that set these recent novels apart from the "lost generation" writing of the 1920s. Europe in 1920 had

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just emerged from the Great War: a generation of men had been slaughtered in the trenches, families were broken, economies shattered, and nerves shot. George Bernard Shaw didn't call Europe "Heartbreak House" for nothing. Moreover, because the French currency was depressed, artists and writers from around the world could afford to gather there and live *la vie de bohème* while inventing the various modernist languages that have dominated the arts in the twentieth century.

The background to the modern Japanese experience is a touch less tragic; not a war, but a trade surplus and what the Japanese call *endaka*, the rise of the yen. And *la vie de bohème* of Paris has given way to *la vie bourgeois* of high-rent Tokyo. Paris attracted artists and writers: Japan attracts its share of missionaries, *buto* students, and martial-arts zealots, but the overwhelming number of Americans there at the moment are bankers, traders, computer jockeys, and English teachers. They may be pursuing side interests in *shodo* ("the way of writing," or calligraphy) or *sumie* painting, but they are basically in Japan in pursuit of opportunity. If Europe in the twenties was Heartbreak House, Japan in our time is *Kanemochi* Castle, "kanemochi" meaning wealthy individual; where the age of modernism has given way to the age of yen. And it is in that spirit that Alec Stern, for example, the hero of Schwartz's *Bicycle Days*, has gone to Japan, not to starve for his art but to become an executive trainee in computers. Similarly, the hero of Leithauser's *Equal Distance* is taking a year off from his law studies at Harvard to work with a Japanese law professor on a problem of international law.

This frequent-flyer literature has enjoyed brisk sales, and it is worth taking a look at how these novels have used Japan I want to stress the word "used" here, for on the whole they prefer to exploit Japan rather than come to terms with it. And since the rest of us are most likely to experience Japan as frequent flyers, their Japan threatens to become our Japan as well, the place where we disembark prepared to see what our writers have seen for us, if only because theirs are the visions that most readily come to hand. The three novels by Leithauser, McInerney, and Schwartz, are remarkably of a piece; soggy laments of flight, quest, and initiation, as post-adolescent *Bildungsromans* usually are. They all find young male heroes lurching between a traumatic past and an uncertain future, seeking some identity for themselves in a place where they believe (wrongly, as it turns out) that the past cannot touch them and that the future holds out the hope of renewal. This distinctly middle-class fiction features characters who have provisionally jettisoned the advantages of birth for the charade of being down on their luck, in order to assume the moral advantages of elective poverty. Of course they get over it, since, in the social niche they inhabit, trauma usually means minor heartbreak and

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fleeting disappointment; the sudden revelation that despite money and position you can sometimes draw a short straw.

It is hard not to notice that the hero of Brad Leithauser's *Equal Justice*, Danny Ott, has scarcely arrived in Kyoto when he finds himself in the pursuit of other *gaijin*. Danny is twenty-two, his girlfriend has dumped him, he is in Japan for the first time, and by page nine he is already tracking down another America on Imadegawa-dori in Kyoto in the hope of a meeting. Failing that, he heads to McDonald's for a hamburger and a Coke. The other American turns out to be one Greg Blaising, a few years older than Danny and decades more cynical, who has been in Kyoto long enough to know where cheap drinks are sold and women can be found. Danny and Greg quickly take up a daily routine of jogging along the *kamogawa* (Kamo River) by day and drinking themselves into oblivion at night. Though Danny does have some contact with *nihonjin*, one Professor Umeda, and teaches English to Japanese students, that activity is largely offstage. At center stage are Danny and Greg, and eventually a young American woman named Carrie, with whom Danny has a tedious realtionship that drags on far longer than a sensible reader can put up with.

One's first thought is that this is not far from what an American serviceman might expect in a foreign post: immoderate drinking, a Dear John experience, and the consoling company of some American buddies. But these aren't servicemen: they are lost-generation groupies on tour, duplicating the serviceman's experience without the serviceman's excuse; indenture to a state that has cast him up on an alien shore.

Why? Answers lie at home, which is always the point of reference. Danny is in flight. His parents are recently divorced; his girlfriend has defected to another man. Danny has decided it is time for a sabbatical and has decamped to Japan as a place to shake off the past and gear up for the future. He is taking only a year off from Harvard, so his convalescence is strictly limited – it ends on registration day of the following year. Greg, the drinker, the lost soul, the ex-pat in the making, tries to envision himself in romantic terms. Asked if he will move back to America, he confesses:

> "Honestly, I don't know. I mean, I can't really go *any*where – can I? – until that map on my wall begins to look enticing again. *Speak to me, O Rand McNally*. But sometimes I do think I've sort of trapped myself. What am I going to do back in the States? I go back, I'm unemployed, I'm just a spoiled bum, whereas here I have a dignified role, I'm an *expatriate*. A sort of Hemingway expatriate seventies-style. Or eighties-style. What year is it?"

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That is grandiloquently lost-generational, but for the fact that Greg too has a home, from which an occasional cake arrives in the mail. Roll over Fitzgerald, tell Picasso the news. Sloshed to the gills though he is, and in training to become a bum, Greg in the end is a frequent flyer who will be happy to find an American gutter to lay his head in.

John Burnham Schwartz's *Bicycle Days* is very much cast in the same mold: the novel of post-adolescent rebellion in which revolts against the flabby privilege of an upper-middle-class background are simply detours along the road to submission. Not unlike Leithauser's Danny Ott, Schwartz's Alec Stern has just graduated from Yale and gone to work for something called Compucom as a trade specialist. He is primed for, and has, the generic experience of Japan. His office, which never rises above cliché, is a gallery of textbook Asiatic types. His employer, Joe Boon, is a displaced American who has fled from his own failures at home to submerge himself in high-tech trade work. He is a sadly typical ex-pat; the man who has squandered his opportunities in the U.S. and is gambling on a new life in the East. Among Alec's office mates are the chain-smoking Takhara-san, a weekend sailor who bought a boat after reading somewhere that women are secretly excited by water; Park, a Korean who frequents the "Turkish bath" establishments in Shinjuku and whose ambition is to star in a live sex show; and Kiyoko Kawashima, the only woman in the firm (except for the five secretaries named Satoh), who at thirty-three is past her prime for marriage and considered "old and boring" by the men in the office. Having spent six years in America, she is aware of her place in Japanese society and reminds Alec: "You have to understand, Alec-san, that I am a woman. In Japan sometimes that is the most important thing about me." With the exception of Kiyoko, this office is a ship of fools sailing in the strange waters of Tokyo.

Where Schwartz succeeds is in creating vivid cameos of Tokyo life. He takes us down into the Tokyo subway, where the heat and crush are borne in stoic silence. He sketches in sharp relief the offices of MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry), where decisions that shape the world's economy are made daily, and the sex shows in Shinjuku where Filipino women perform with volunteers from the audience. At his best, Schwartz is a touring anthropologist who to pass the time is studying Japanese culture, particularly the rules of dating. Twenty-one-year-old Alec is told:

> "First date, second date, third date, on each one she expects that you act a certain way, that you do and say certain things. . . . You must walk up to her slowly and compliment her. Not like a big movie star, but quietly. . . . So, you compliment her beauty and her clothes, ev-

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> erything, and you make her laugh. And then you suggest dancing. Before you leave, you tell her that if you do not see her again, you will become very ill, you will be hospitalized. When she hears that, she will give you her phone number. That is the first meeting."

Such is the folkore you pick up in the first month in Japan, and Alec never gets beyond it. At the end, he is no more than a frequent flyer who gets his ticket punched in all the fashionable places. That isn't just because he is a very young man or because Japan is hard to know, but because he has bad manners, and without good manners you are condemned to remain on the outside of Japanese life, your face pressed to the *shoji* screen as you try to imagine what passion and mystery are sequestered on the other side.

While the thoughtless, self-absorbed hero is a staple of contemporary fiction, I'm not sure that Schwartz intended Alec to be quite so callow or unmannered. People take care of him and he utters not a word of gratitude, not even a simple *domo*. He lives with the Hasagawas, who feed him, shelter him, and provide him with family and friendship, but if Alec ever expresses an ounce of gratitude, I fail to find it. So far as I can tell, he never presents a gift, and for a *gaijin* to live in Japan oblivious to the rule of gifts is to live up to the most derogatory connotation of that word: barbarian. (*Gaijin* does not in fact translate well into English: neither "foreigner," "alien," "outsider," nor even "barbarian" quite captures the condescension implied in the word. *Gaijin*, however, translates perfectly into Yiddish: *goy*.)

The women in Alec's life should have taken heed. Alec has a brief affair with Masako, whom he meets in a bar. They bathe together and it all seems cheerful and erotic until she falls in love with him. "I rubbu you," she says in her poor English, to which he replies coldly in Japanese, "Love is complicated." In seconds he is out the door. His treatment of Kiyoko Kawashima is no better. He seduces her and then stops speaking to her for ten days while finishing up a report on trade policy for Compucon. Japanese husbands are notorious for such neglect, but American young men are supposed to have more romance in them than that. Alec is short on romance. A business school graduate, he has an accountant's soul.

I wish I could offer a better report on Jay McInerney's novel *Ransom*, since McInerney, unlike the others, is a gifted and ambitious writer who has affection for Japan and, as a sometime student in a *karate dojo*, a sturdier relation to its culture. To turn to *Ransom* after the other two novels is to encounter the work of a writer with a sardonic wit, a flair for social incongruity, an instinct for the comic fringe of culture, and an exacting ear

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for brittle repartee. McInerney's Japan is alive with strange juxtapositions, like shopping bags which are imprinted with the words "FUNKY BABE: Let's call a funky girl 'Funky Babe.' Girls, open-minded, know how to swing. Love to feel everything rather than think. They must all be nice girls." Moreover, McInerney's character, Christopher Ransom, unlike Danny Ott and Alec Stern, is not a generic young Ivy Leaguer out to cultivate a taste for *sake* before taking charge of the family fortune, but someone with a vivid profile and a deeper reason than tourism for being in Asia. He is there to do penance; another routine American motive that, along with curiosity, adventurism, and missionary – as well as military – fanaticism propels Americans off to foreign soils. The penitent is the guilty counterpart to the missionary. Where the latter sets sail to make conversions, the former is off to be converted. Self-renewal is one of the appeals of Asia as an alternative civilization, and the American passion for periodic rebirth is one explanation why so many young Americans in Japan are either lapsed Mormons or aspiring Buddhists.

Christopher Ransom has come to Kyoto to lose himelf in the martial arts, in the quest for discipline and purification. Behind him is a squalid history of drugs and an incident on the Afghan border of Pakistan in which one of his travelling partners disappeared into Afghanistan in pursuit of a drug deal, while another had died of an overdose of heroin administered intentionally by Ransom. Farther in the background is a domineering father who writes for television and is in what he calls "the power business." The father's machinations to control his son cross the International Date Line, and even in Kyoto Ransom is under surveillance. Leaving aside the details for a moment, it should be apparent that the essential story of *Ransom*, like that of *Equal Distance* and *Bicycle Days*, is made in America.

In fact, *Ransom* is a book about power, its sources and its uses, and in that respect it is a more ambitious novel than the others. Christopher Ransom, like many another repentant druggie, is out to cleanse himself of guilt and desire and to turn psychological weakness into power over himself and his immediate surroundings. To do this he submits himself to the discipline of *karate* (literally "empty hands") in Kyoto: "Ransom believed he would become a different person, better somehow, if he kept training. Without actually cataloguing imagined benefits, he felt that the discipline would tone all of his being. It was a way of knowing himself. He wished to be morally taut and resolute, and at the same time more at ease with his fellow creatures, to achieve a self-mastery that would reduce the complexity of transacting with others."

McInerney is too ironic to follow through on sanctity or moral tautness, and cuts his hero off at the pass. That's Hollywood cowboy lingo to

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be sure, but then *Ransom* is a cowboy movie set in Kyoto, a sushi Western where some characters wear boots and spurs and hang out at a café called "Buffalo Rome." Miles Ryder, a Kyoto cowboy who owns a Western outfitter's shop called Hormone Derange, has fled to Japan after taking a two-by-four to the head of a drug dealer in Texas.

True to a genre which traditionally codes its characters' moral standing by the color of their hats, *Ransom*'s black hat is worn by one Frank DeVito, ex-Marine and Bruce Lee devotee, who has been dishonorably discharged for assaulting an Okinawa schoolgirl and has washed up in Kyoto "to study at the *dojo* of a maverick sensei of dubious standing in the karate world who made movies starring himself and who demonstrated his skills by killing oxen barehanded." There are reasons beyond cleansing and moral austerity that might draw one to Kyoto to practice kicks to the belly. It doesn't take a seminar in psychoanalysis to tell us that DeVito has been set up as Chris Ransom's dark alter ego, the brute side of the human equation that has no patience with being "morally taut and resolute," preferring the martial side of the "martial arts" to the art. It isn't difficult to see *Ransom* as a psychodrama, something between a Hollywood Western and a Kurosawa samurai epic – *High Noon* along the Kamo River. Chris Ransom is destined to be killed, or rather to permit himself to be killed, by DeVito: after all, if there is blood on your conscience and you are in Japan to do penance, penance will have to be done.

Along the way, Ransom is visited by his father, who turns out to have been keeping tabs on him through a woman named Marilyn. It is a painful visit, during which the father, a failed playwright who has gone into television and become wildly successful, instructs Chris: "You think I'm in the entertainment business, but what I'm really in – what we're all in – is the power business. Someone is going to have to have power and if it isn't you, then you're helpless, at the mercy of anybody who has it." It is a lesson Chris has already learned in Pakistan, and to which he will finally submit as he agrees to a showdown with DeVito, with swords.

Never mind what all this means. I don't think it means anything very profound, though I find myself amused by McInerney's short takes, especially his running commentary on Japanese pop culture. It is hard not to be charmed by the brief vignettes of the way Japan absorbs Western music: the band leader at the Buffalo Rome Café announces, "Let's get down and dirty," and counts down the beat, "Ichi, ni, san, shi," leading into "Got My Mojo Workin'." This sort of scene is cleverly drawn and brutally accurate, and McInerney has more fun than the other writers with the cultural face-off that produces, among Japanese and Americans alike, the comic vanities of hybrid behavior. Americans looking for their *ki* through *karate* or Zen or *kendo* are no less ripe for satiricial sendups

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than *nihonjin* getting down and dirty with Muddy Waters.

The soul of the book, however, strikes me as being way off center. Like *Equal Distance* and *Bicycle Days*, *Ransom* manipulates Japan without being responsible to it. Though a more competent piece of writing than the other novels, it remains a book about Americans exercising their egos in places as far from home as they can get without leaving the middle class, airing out their troubled psyches on Japanese clotheslines. When I taught a course in American literature at Kobe University several years ago, I gave my Japanese students *Ransom* to read, to see what their response would be. Without exception they disliked the book, and asked, "What has any of this to do with Japan?" Japanese are tired of such books, in which they are obliged to lend antics and color to tales of initiation that have little to do with them, and in which their country and culture are held up to ridicule.

Japan emerges from this literature as something of a theme park, populated by figurines called Japanese who perform a prescribed and insipid choreography of steps around the main characters, who are too absorbed with their own mental dramas to be more than bemused. As in a theme park, the characters come in through turnstiles at Narita Airport, get their tickets punched at all the rides, and turn back to the real world when money and time run out. Such things are in the nature of tourism, and while I'm no enemy of tourism, as literature it tends to range from the titillating to the pretentious. To be sure, Japan collaborates in the illusion: its vast shopping complexes and nighttime pleasure emporia are built for consumption and amusement, as if becoming a theme park were at the heart of a national strategy hatched at MITI to market the nation as Tokyoland, Kyotoland, in which all has become utterly *kawaii* – cute – according to the latest and most depressing aesthetic fad to possess the Japanese imagination. A Japanese student recently remarked to me, in what sounds like a commonplace, "Paris is a museum, New York is a zoo, and Tokyo is an amusement park." A young American, dazzled by the bright lights of the big city, may conclude that the spectacle is the country itself. Evidently there are Japanese who are prone to believe so as well.

It is an embarrassment that our fiction should provide a less reliable account of a culture than our business and economic tracts, and it might seem that the disparity represents the greater seriousness of our business community. If the business community is looking ever more closely at the puppeteers, then our novelists would seem to be fixated still on the puppets. But the measure of the novels' failures is not in the corresponding analyses from the economists, but in other books that explore the same grounds of experience and culture: a wonderful memoir of a year in Japan

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by David Mura, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, and three recent novels by English writers which provide more insight on Japanese culture than anything Americans have been able to muster: John David Morley's *Pictures from the Water Trade: Adventures of a Westerner in Japan*; Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*, and Clive Collins's *Sachiko's Wedding*. These books stand as evidence, if such were needed, that veiled and robed in black as Japan may sometimes appear, the real Japan is anything but invisible to Western eyes that have grown accustomed to the dark.

MARK SHECHNER

In Perspective

POWERS OF CONGRESS. By Alice Fulton. David R. Godine Publishers, Inc. $10.95.
GREEN THE WITCH-HAZEL WOOD. By Emily Hiestand. Graywolf Press. $9.00.
CHANNEL. By Barbara Jordan. Beacon Press. $9.95.
THE GAME OF STATUES. By Martha Hollander. Atlantic Monthly Press. $9.95.

There is a foreground and a background. Or, to put it another way, a poem is an assembly of perspectives. In the last two decades the American poem and American poets have been engaged in a compelling revision of these perspectives. I find these four poets – very diverse in other ways – comparable in that each can deploy the space which has been opened up, by innovative poets and poems, between foreground and background. Each is determined to experiment in that space. They put together their poems as if they knew that in such a space, after all, momentous things occur. This is the more remarkable because the brilliant, male poets of the postwar era – Roethke, Berryman, Lowell – wrote poems in which the background was made indistinct, if not invisible, by a dominant foreground. Everything was point-blank. Even the skunk in Lowell's poem "Skunk-Hour" has to creep up to the poem's powerful front-on scenario. There are no distances. Everything is head-on. The trouble about this is that, even when such a poem is ambitious and successful, it occurs in a restricted depth of vision. We have to peer over the poet's shoulders to

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see beyond the constructed view, like craning around someone in a cinema.

Elizabeth Bishop has been acclaimed, and I think rightly, for disarranging these perspectives. In a poem like "At the Fishhouses" or "In the Waiting-Room" Bishop rescheduled our expectation within the poem. Her voice with its beautiful, desolate tones acts as a zoom lens, moving in and out, reminding us of detail, leaving us astonished by the overview. In that sort of skillful separation, and what it offers the contemporary poem, wonderful things can happen. A new sort of nature poem may occur, for instance. The sacred can be restated and reexamined. And when the foreground has been defined purely as foreground, then the background recedes and the poet's voice has a different carrying power. We hear a wonderful array of tones and are instantly alerted to them, like listening to someone calling a child home in a summer twilight.

These distances and perspectives are not of course linear placements. They can be subtle contrasts of the sort one of these poets, Emily Hiestand, pointed out when defining her regard for Elizabeth Bishop: "I admire her honesty: that she yearns for correspondences – between things transcendent and things quotidian, between human consciousness and the rest of the natural world." Nor can these perspectives – however striking they look – be invented by contemporary poets; they can be only rediscovered as permanent possibilities in the form. In an article on Emily Dickinson, for instance, Alice Fulton is emphatic that Dickinson is herself a radical cartographer. She writes of Dickinson's ability to "forge inner landscapes from abstract rather than concrete language and to express ideas – states of being if you will – without resorting to an objective correlative."

I like the idea of an inner landscape made from abstract rather than concrete language. But I see something different in *Powers of Congress* by Alice Fulton. She is an ambitious, powerful poet. In fact one of her problems may be that she is, quite often, a take-it-or-leave-it technician with a rushing line and a swift argument. Her themes – like those of her great exemplar, Dickinson – are the sacred and profane. But instead of seeking to define the profane by the sacred, as Dickinson often can, Fulton says – in poem after poem – how about doing the opposite, how about using the profane to point toward the sacred? In the masterful title poem "Powers of Congress," she invites us to this paradox, detailing experiences of stress and force in the ironies of daily life:

> All night couples pledge
> to stay flux, the hit-run stuff
> of cracked homes. Men trim their quick

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lawns each weekend, trailing power
mowers. Heartslaves, you've seen them: wives
with flexed hair, hitched to bored kids,
twiddling in good living rooms,
their twin beds slept in, changed, made.

In the nineteenth century the thirst for design, the intellectual drift and purpose of the poet, was subsumed in the artifice of a poem. We deduce the enormous aesthetic will of a Tennyson, of a Dickinson, not from what they wrote but from the way they wrote it. Fulton's thematic decisions, rather than her technical handling of the line, betray the strong will within her poetic direction. Her poems are daring and broad. She will try anything; and the latest thing she has tried is neither proof nor promise of the next. Here is one about "the credits and debits of cold sex"; there is one about frost. The second is a lacy, tough mixture of ornament and lyric; the first is a small, charged drama of tone. Her language is not always certain and her tone is occasionally too much the same from poem to poem, making for an occasional lack of freshness and variety. But these flaws need not disguise her considerable skill and the real pleasures of *Powers of Congress*. She is a thematic gambler of the best sort. There is a range of perspectives in her work and she deploys them well:

Nothing will unfold for us unless we move toward what
looks to us like nothing: faith is a cascade.
The sky's high solid is anything
but, the sun going under hasn't
budged and if death divests the self
it's the sole event in nature
that's exactly what it seems.
("Cascade Experiment")

The remaking of nature poetry is always a challenge within a discourse. Emily Hiestand seems particularly fit for the challenge, as does Barbara Jordan in *Channel*. But they take different approaches. Emily Hiestand, both in *Green the Witch-Hazel Wood* and in some of her more recent poems from a forthcoming collection called *The Idea of Home*, shows a rare, and sometimes two-edged, gift for irony:

There are givens – pliable days
when trees and rain flow in the fields
like paint from tubes. ("Making Our Garden")

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Her poems are full of the correspondences and yearnings she observed in Bishop's. Her line is swift, with a lovely, citric vernacular about it. I admire this in particular about her work: a tone which appears throwaway and talky, but is in fact a powerful and gifted stylization within her wider themes; a sort of sibylline demotic. These pleasures of tone make the control in her nature poems a real mix of verve and intensity:

> Now is the time to write the poem of your life:
> a damp day that goes unspoken, a jar
> of ink on a sill among slippered whelks,
> the field full of bi-color corn and young corn,
> and the plain brown road to the house plump
> with spilt tomatoes.
>
> ("Little Art")

These are wonderful gifts to find in poetry, and they are there in abundance in both *Green the Witch-Hazel Wood* and her more recent work. But they have their price. Her poetry shows a controlling intelligence which occasionally slips into a restrictive one. Her work is rich in irony but could do with being more revelatory of those conflicts which irony resolves and protects. I don't doubt they are there, but they are often concealed.

Barbara Jordan's nature poetry is closely allied to themes of the sacred, but her approach is quite different from Alice Fulton's. "All things become sacred from long gazing," she writes in the third section of *Tutelary Poems*. Long gazing is one of the pleasures and achievements of *Channel*. Her poetry does indeed have a foreground and a background, and they are determined by the twin distances she proposes of lyricism and meditation. It's an interesting mix, and by no means as familiar an idiom now as it would have been, say, to Gerard Manley Hopkins. Her inner landscapes are not so much made out of abstract language as her outer ones are composed – sometimes quite wonderfully – of surreal terms. This is from a poem called "To England" which is one of those portraits that are both important and exceptionally difficult to do well:

> Kingdom of backyard naturalists,
> cartographer of sacred stones.
> Once, your aristocracy had a periscope in every
> chimney,
> and wore, to hunt, the Order of the Stoat on
> their lapels;
> Thumbelinas floated in a walnut shell,

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and dioramas of the Great Fire and Waterloo
preserved, like a plague arm in formaldehyde.

There is something beautiful and strange about a poem like this – "Shell Pond Woods" – with its mixture of contemporary reference and historical allusion:

They hear us before we break cover
into the square summer field,
and the hot whir of cicadas and honeybees
drowns any rustling at the edge
where deer and hare and fox have fled
to wait concealed by leaves –
like creatures in the borders of an illumined
manuscript.

Martha Hollander would know what Henry James meant when he remarked that he had a notice above his workplace saying "Dramatize! Dramatize!" She makes the most of a wonderful ability to charge the lyric moment with conflict and unease. This in turn gives her tone perhaps the most assured note of any of these poets, although she may lack Hiestand's subtlety or Fulton's head-on force. But she has a blessed, buttonholing narrative music and she uses it to effect in "Difficult Movie":

Reflected horribly in the grand piano,
the sky is offered up as your accompanist.
You pick out a melody with one hand,
sweating and waiting, while
the apartment stays unremittingly gray.
When she walks in through the half-open door
(an identical door can be glimpsed behind),
she seems to bring color with her.
Now you begin the dialogue of murmured threats
and non sequiturs, and stare each other down.
The blinds throw satisfying stripes along a
wall,
movements of sunlight litter the carpet,
and everywhere are the sweet gleams of
her earrings, your shared wineglass, a gun.

Here indeed is a boldness with the foreground, the background, the long, settled glimpses of drama and innuendo, which have only recently

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become available. *The Game of Statues*, in any case, is a bold enterprise. The poems are written with dash and speed. Several of them mix the same malaise as "Difficult Movie." Some of them are slightly weakened, I feel, by having starting-off points that are expressive – about paintings, for instance – and look like a pretext, when the poem itself is rooted in powerful experience. But Martha Hollander – and this is her first book – is already a persuasive poetic voice.

I began this consideration of four distinct and distinguished American poets with remarks about distance and perspective. They show that there are exciting vistas in the way the American poem is now composed, and yet, even as an admiring outsider, it seems necessary to end on a negative note. What Bishop brought to all poetry was not brought to it as a matter of policy. She did not deploy her background – anymore than Lowell filled his foreground – out of some cool poetic design. She charted her territory with all the obsessive pain, avoidance, dread and sudden discovery which is the mark of true poetic courage. It just seems to me a present danger that what she achieved with instinct, at great expense, may be treated by all of us as some sort of pleasure park within the poetic discourse: a place of calm borders and obvious boundaries. It is not. This is the poet, after all, who said in an interview that she felt "like a guest" everywhere. The place in her poems is neither calm nor easily reached. It is – if it is anything definable – a new land whose discovery is the more remarkable because she was once lost there.

EAVAN BOLAND

Rock and Bone, Water and Soul

PROMISED LANDS. By Peter Sacks. Viking Penguin. $17.95.

The title of Peter Sacks's first book, *In These Mountains*, suggested his ties to a particular heartland, but also hinted at a lurking, more general metaphysical splendor. Given this tension between place and spirit, his new book, *Promised Lands*, further delves into Sacks's obsession with "home" – wherever (to quote Elizabeth Bishop) that may be.

Sacks's birthplace is South Africa, his heritage Jewish, and he's lived on and off in the United States for many years. All three facts govern his work, where place becomes a correlative to spirit, geography a guide to

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the spirit's workings. The earlier book focused on how local conditions shaped sensibility; now, in *Promised Lands*, Sacks steps from the local toward the visionary. But for all his mystic craving, he is brought back to earth by the inescapable histories of South Africa and of the Jews. Each history exerts great pressure on Sacks's imagination.

In relation to his Judaism, the poet has steeped himself in Jewish mysticism and Jewish Law. But he can connect with this lore only by submitting it to an almost savage, at times despairing, scrutiny. In the case of Law, his humanity is outraged by the Law's questionable origins: The Law declares the need of sacrifice, but sacrifice is also butchery. And in the case of mysticism, he draws back from the violent excess of the martyr whose mortified or tortured flesh is recompensed by visions. This revulsion from Law and mysticism in part inspires poems like "Caesarea"; but Sacks's desire for absolute knowledge, which the Law and the teachings of the mystic promise, draws him into uneasy sympathy with what he seems to deplore.

In "Caesarea" the poet contrasts a contemporary pilgrim, his "weak voice lifting to the wind/ some milky song of Jesus," with the martyrdom of Eleazar who "saw as he was nailed to the ground/ the souls of the righteous cleansing// in the waters of Shiloah, preparing/ for Akiba's teaching in the seventh palace/ to which even the angels brought their chairs." This passage, which begins with the gruesome martyrdom and ends with a homely and triumphant evocation of the angels receiving human instruction from Eleazar's fellow martyr, Akiba, hints at how conflicted Sacks is about his visionary sources. This comes clear in the poem's final stanzas; after Eleazar's martyrdom and visionary fulfillment, Sacks questions whether the vision isn't simply compensatory, an attempt to lend dignity to pointless suffering:

> – As who would not believe?
> Or wish to – even the "decaying scribe,"
> so-called already in Akiba's time,
>
> who sitting in the warm sea wind
> that will not purify, however hard
> it blows against these stones,
>
> rewrites or cancels yet another
> passage of the Law –
> something of sacrifice, or daily butchery:

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And when the meat is white,
Even the veins of it,
Scrape off the salt.
Scrape off the bloody salt.

Here the poet is the modern-day equivalent of the " 'decaying scribe'," his own questioning another step in a process of abstraction that begins with tortured flesh and ends with milky songs of Jesus. And yet in the fierce pleasure of the injunction to scrape off the salt – a pleasure heightened by noting that the flesh is bloody, and so at one time alive – Sacks's parody of the Law shows up its resemblance to torture. The violence of scraping flesh for dietary reasons could equally refer to the tortured flesh of the martyrs: Sacks seems to hint at how the fanaticism of Law (the chosen must die for the faith) and the brutality of the torturers collude. With offhand irony, Sacks heightens this moral ambiguity when he suggests the humdrum nature of such butchery, its dailiness rendering it habitual.

But the poet goes even further – he doesn't simply impersonate the decayed scribe. When he repeats the command to scrape off the salt, Sacks's parody of the Law makes the Law even more savage. This suggests that the poet, despite his condemnation of the Law's and the torturer's savagery, feels a corresponding attraction to that savagery – especially since the last two lines so forcefully highlight through repetition the violence of the command to scrape off the salt. It's almost as if Sacks, in his contempt for his own role as a decaying scribe, were ordering himself to scrape off his civilized veneer and experience with Eleazar his ecstatic vision: Of course this desire points up the poet's powerful self-identification with the torture the martyrs undergo as a source of spiritual – and poetic – inspiration. Even those who sing milky songs of Jesus or who are only decayed scribes take part in this ritual of murder and redemption.

It's a measure of Sacks's courage and artistic control that he dramatizes these moral tensions without trying to whitewash his own ambiguous motives. He reveals to the reader those forces in the self that contribute to historical atrocity, but in such a way that we can contemplate them: Sacks takes his (and our) measure for potential evil, not to scare us, but to alert us to the brutality that lurks in what tradition labels as sacred.

South Africa, like Judaism, calls up the poet's obsession with scraping off the bloody salt of so-called civilized behavior. In "Reddersburg," a magnificent poem about visiting his father's birthplace, the stony landscape of the veld comes to mirror his father's stubborn strength, stoical in the face of unyielding political realities. Sacks sees his own face in this mirror and acknowledges his debt to that "core of resistant strength." But the poem, for all its quiet tenderness toward the father, also rebukes his

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stoicism: "the almost liquid softness/ of a man whose favorite word is *rugged*." This iron in the soul which Sacks admires also terrifies him because it seems "an image of the fixity/ now shattering the country. . . ." The poet searches for a way past such fixity when he prays "neither for inherited/ belief nor patience,/ but for a persistence as of anger/ hardening the hope that listens// for a sound – improbable, warm and vehement/ as the rain, heard falling evenly/ beyond the one clear ring of steel,/ chiseling memorials for what it could not save."

The chisel, its obdurate steel emblematic of the stoicism of his forefathers, is also the tool that memorializes the victims of apartheid. But the respectful tones of elegy aren't the only ones ringing out: Because Sacks couches the passage as a prayer, and a prayer enlists the future for fulfillment, elegy turns to prophecy. So in forecasting the need for memorials, the poet also hints at the downfall of apartheid's enforcers: The chisel is as much a weapon as a tool, its steel point freighted with a warning, even a threat of violence "against the will of those who rule." And because this ruling class is drawn from his father's generation, the father's stoicism and the rulers' hardness of heart almost begin to blur. But typically, Sacks also admits his share of national shame. Though he may wield the chisel of poetic redress against his country's wrongs, he cannot save it. (The poet's sense of his own impotence is reinforced by the irony that the father is a doctor, and so a kind of savior, and that Reddersburg, as Sacks informs us in a headnote, means "town of the Savior.")

Ultimately the poem depicts the dilemma of the liberal white South African who hopes to save the country through political change but in his heart understandably fears the resulting violence. And though the poem remains ambiguous on this issue, stoicism can be one of the masks of this fear. At an even deeper level, the fierce irony of a savior who abets injustice by his stoical endurance of it makes the poem (though still an implied critique) an almost despairing gesture of reconciliation: both toward the figure of the father who clearly abhors apartheid, but dimly represents the spiritual inertia which apartheid fosters; and the victims of apartheid, the black encampments "isolated well enough to cut the tenants off/ from killing any but themselves."

But as Sacks well knows, no such reconciliation is possible – which is why, at the end of "Reddersburg," he draws attention to the impotence of language to save himself or his country from the degradation of its history. Still, the poem hints at hope in the image of the rain "improbable, warm and vehement," as it falls evenly over the rocky veld. But whether this rain will soften the obdurate landscape of the fatherland or wash it away in a violent flood, the poet leaves ambiguous.

Sacks's estrangement from his own origins in "Caesarea" and

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"Reddersburg" also fuels what may be the most remarkable poem in the book: To say that "Alaska" is a symbolist poem in method, but the most naked kind of spiritual autobiography imaginable, gives some idea of the poem's originality.

"Alaska" takes place underwater. In keeping with the fluidity and ghostliness of such a medium, the lyric *I* in "Caesarea" and "Reddersburg" dissolves. Sometimes the speaker seems the representative of a "chosen people" who, ironically, "know nothing of purity except the word"; sometimes the voice of apocalypse; and sometimes a disembodied seer who speaks of the poet's own spiritual agony as a kind of weightless, substanceless limbo: "No visionary cycle ordered in the mind,/ only the chaos of what's glimpsed/ while sinking, sway and countersway,/ the sea-bent glimmer of disaster." These lines, which insist on randomness as opposed to visionary order, point up the central dilemma in "Alaska": the poet's own despairing sense of himself as a latecomer to cultural traditions which he can neither accept nor wholly reject.

Not surprisingly, his visionary impulses turn up only pale shadows of the promised land: As a self-mocking seer, he dramatizes his failure to find a ground of being not polluted by blood or violent excess. And yet his visionary impotence implies a subtle critique of the disastrous mythology of "the chosen people." As in "Caesarea" and "Reddersburg," Sacks feels both attracted and repelled by cultural forces which form the self but also contribute to the violence of history. And though ultimately he stands against such violence, his desire for visionary intensity makes him long for a poetry founded on the spiritual authority of Old Testament prophecy, but without Old Testament gore. Sacks longs to overbear history and personality with visionary ardor and see the soul untrammeled in its ecstasy. This is, of course, yet another mythology closed off to cultural latecomers. As "Alaska" ruefully acknowledges, the chosen people and their visionary spokesmen are mired too deeply in history ever to be clean.

However, the poet hints at states of being that, if not free of history and personality, at least have the power to suspend their workings momentarily. In "Arizona" Sacks writes of an isolated pool of water in a desert canyon. It functions also as an inner landscape, dry and hard as the veld or Palestine, but cleansed by a long-receded flood. Surrounded by stone, the sedimentary remains of earth's primal waters, the speaker imagines swimming in the pool and:

> . . . looking up between
> each sphere of light hung motionless
> in its descent, until this

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looking is a steady lift

beyond the cast-off coil
of skin, flesh, skeleton
scattered back down-canyon
in a twisting corridor of bone.
As if this brilliant fall had drawn
the rising waters of the soul.

In the last two lines the tentative "As if" quietly alludes to the cultural lateness of the perception without impeaching its authenticity. In fact, the modest acknowledgement of this limit keeps the perception firmly in this world even as it asserts metaphysical possibilities. Charged with the richness of Sacks's own yearning, yet separate from it, this stripped landscape of bare rock and bone, water and soul, comes close to the elemental and spiritual purity the poet seeks.

From the quotations I think it's clear that Sacks is a formal writer, his nostalgia for an ideal order hinted at in his use of slant rhyme, regular stanza patterns, and a loosened, uneasily metrical line. The steady brilliance of the writing ensures the reader's trust, even when the poems are at their most elevated or obscure. Certain lines and phrases possess the gnomic grandeur of Hart Crane or late Yeats. His verbal gifts are matched by the emotional coherence of the writing, its moral passion, and its tone of stalwart, humane questioning. Though Sacks's subject may be the failure of visionary experience to transform the world, his art in chronicling that failure becomes its own vision, courageous, original, timelessly achieved.

TOM SLEIGH

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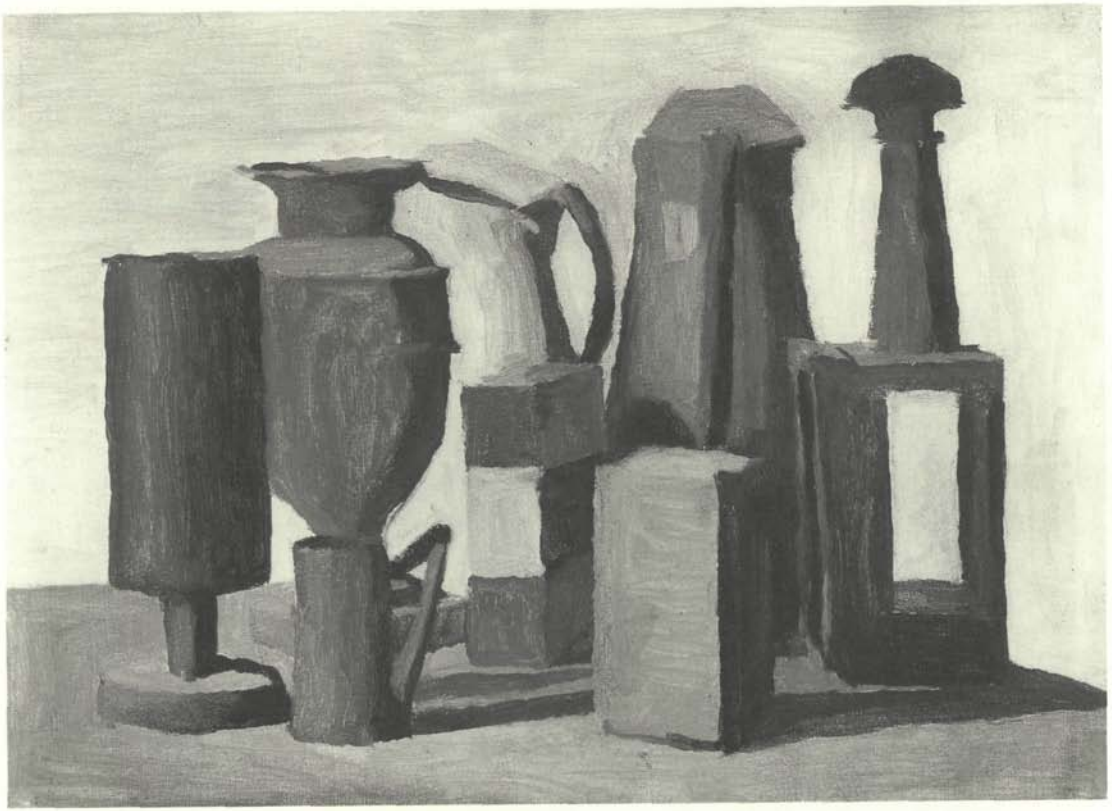

Natura Morta (1943) by Giorgio Morandi. Oil on canvas. 12 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Baldacci-Daverio Gallery Ltd.

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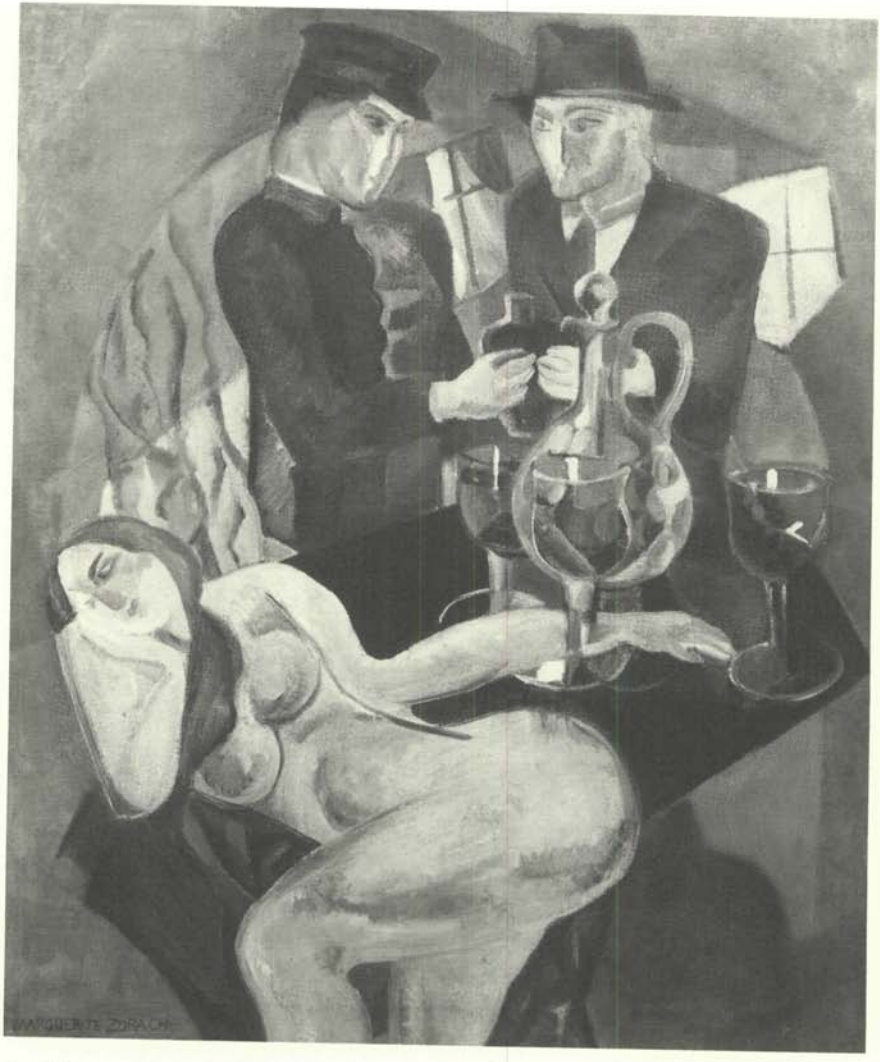

Prohibition (1920) by Marguerite Zorach. Oil on canvas. 30 1/8 x 25 inches. Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries.

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Sister Slag: Apparatus for the Production of By-Products (1993) by Eve Andrée Laramee. Cast iron, slag, glass, copper, coal, rubber, grease, salt, motor oil, water activated battery, DNA, beeswax, electric flask heating mantel. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of John Gibson Gallery.

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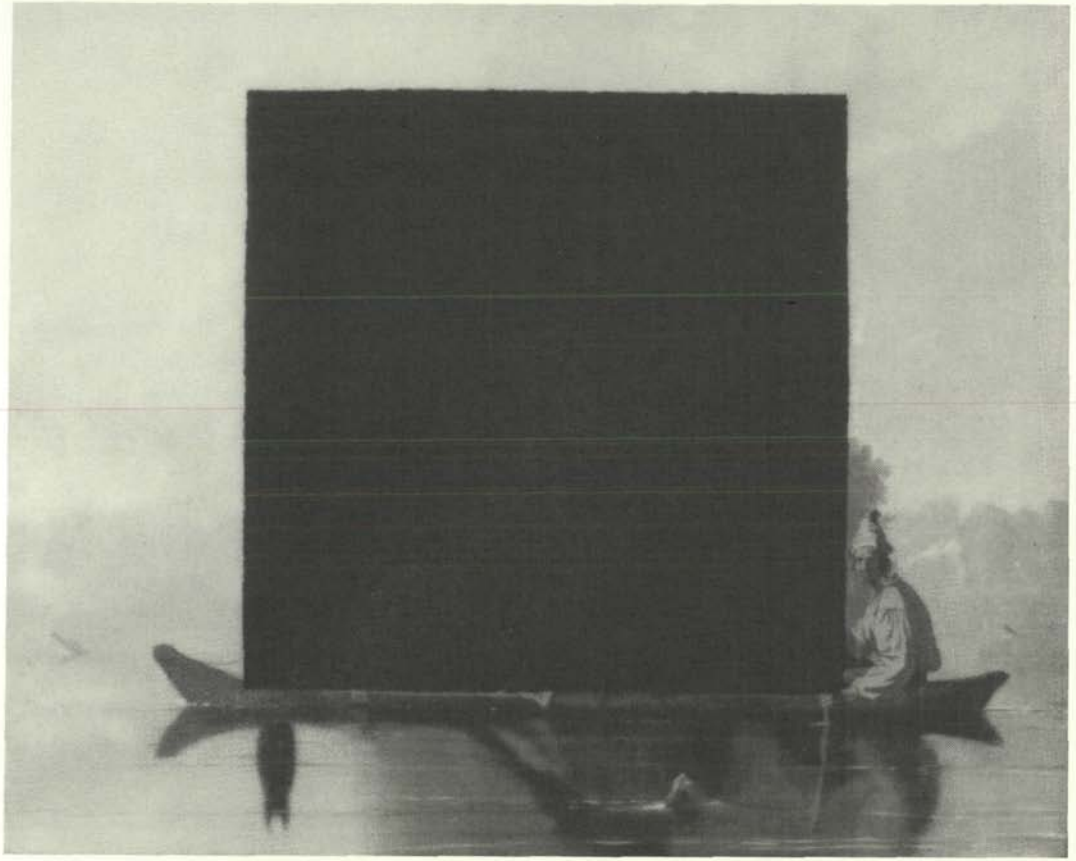

Shadows Turn Back (1992) by Leonid Lerman. Oil on offset print. 27 1/4 x 34 inches. Courtesy of McKee Gallery.

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